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A Thematic Study of James Fenimore Cooper's Nautical Fiction.

Philip Neil Cooksey

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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A THEMATIC STUDY OF JAMES FENIMORE COOPER'S
NAUTICAL FICTION

A Dissertation

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in

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by
Philip Neil Cooksey
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M.A., Oklahoma State University, 1972
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EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Philip Neil Cooksey

Major Field: English

Title of Thesis: A THEMATIC STUDY OF JAMES FENIMORE COOPER'S
NAUTICAL FICTION

Approved:

Dorrell E. Stanford

Major Professor and Chairman

James G. Traynham

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

James L. Babin

Lawrence A. Sasek

James T. Norton

Anne C. Loveland

John Hazard Wilkerson

Date of Examination:

July 7, 1977

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this examination of ten of Cooper's sea tales is to trace their chronological progression from romantic, adventure stories to symbolic and even allegorical tales of human spiritual ordeal. Also, this study makes qualitative judgments of these novels and examines the fictional failures and successes they present to the reader.

Chapter two is a summary analysis of the first five nautical novels, which were written between 1824 and 1842. The first three--The Pilot, The Red Rover, and The Water-Witch--are similar in their romantic, idealized characters and in their picaresque actions, which involve miraculous events set in provincial, and usually pre-revolutionary times. In Homeward Bound, the fourth sea tale, Cooper introduces social criticism into the genre with the Montauk, a floating microcosm of American caricatures. The Two Admirals is an English story, a paean to the superb British fleet. The nautical elements in these first five tales contribute to exciting action sequences, but they are not functional as regards the political, social, and nationalistic themes Cooper attempts to express through them.

Chapters three, four, and five are each devoted to individual novels. Wing-and-Wing is Cooper's first realistic

sea story. In its protagonist's suffering due to his smug sense of self, his pride, and his having faith only in things seen, Wing-and-Wing represents a significant departure from the early novels that it resembles in some ways. Afloat and Ashore chronicles the moral and spiritual struggles within Miles Wallingford, whose education, in his experience of the adult world by way of various voyages, is a nautical rite of passage comparable to that of Melville's Redburn. Here for the first time Cooper exploits the natural spectacle so abundantly available with the genre of the sea story. The Sea Lions is Cooper's last sea story, and in ways it is the climax of his development as a Christian writer. Using twin ships and twin captains, Cooper employs a doppelganger theme to probe the division within man of body and soul and the struggle within him between good and evil. Rather than the nautical novel's being simply a vehicle for escapism, here the symbolic voyage allowed Cooper to make an inner exploration into the universal truth, for him, of the spiritual nature of reality.

Chapter six includes brief treatments of two stories. Ned Myers is a biography, a slice of a sailor's life that is a readable but limited account which climaxes with Ned's spiritual rebirth. Jack Tier is, except for Mercedes of Castile, the worst of Cooper's nautical tales. Written in 1848, it is an unexpected reversion to the romantic type of story Cooper was writing between 1824 and 1842. It is

a novel flawed by many improbabilities and peopled with characters even more unreal and uninvolving than the marionettes of the early tales.

This chronological study of Cooper's nautical fiction reveals his growth as a writer, particularly in his creation of more realistic and believable stories and in his exploiting the resources the sea genre offers to the writer. These ten novels are too often neglected by students and scholars, and while overall they compare unfavorably with the Leatherstocking series, they do in the best of them make a serious challenge to being the apogee of Cooper's literary career.

- I. Introduction "I have often thought, sir, that the ocean was like human life,--a blind track for all that is ahead, and none of the clearest as respects that which has passed over. Many a man runs headlong to his own destruction, and many a ship steers for a reef under a press of canvas. Tomorrow is a fog into which none of us can see; and even the present time is little better than thick weather, into which we look without getting much information."¹

James Fenimore Cooper did not invent the nautical novel, but he did more than any other writer to his time to popularize and shape the new genre. Yet today few readers who are not specialists are even aware of Cooper's having written eleven sea novels, which form the largest single group of his thirty-three novels. Informed contemporary opinion ranges from unexcited recognition of his authorship of these books to this high praise from Warren Walker: "If James Fenimore Cooper had written nothing but his eleven tales of the sea, he would still have been a major figure in American literature, for with these works he shaped a special genre."² One of my goals in this study is to test the soundness of Walker's claim and to discover the accomplishments and failings of these sea tales.

When I began this work I was at first perplexed over how little seemed to be known among my colleagues about Cooper's sea fiction. There was a reprehensibly large number who offered only blank stares to questions about

such mysterious titles as The Red Rover, The Water-Witch, and Wing-and-Wing. Turning to the critics, I discovered that not only are Cooper's sea novels little read, but they have received surprisingly scant critical attention. One of the most influential treatments of Cooper's works was Yvor Winters' in his 1938 classic, Maule's Curse. Winters concludes his chapter on Cooper with this telling statement: "For the American who desires a polite education in his own literature, the five novels of the Leatherstocking are indispensable, as are the first two Littlepage novels, The Bravo, and The Water-Witch."³ Only the final novel in this list is one of Cooper's eleven sea novels. Such has tended to be their critical fate. General surveys, such as those of D. E. S. Maxwell, A. N. Kaul, and Earnest Leisy, omit any substantive discussions of the sea novels.⁴ Book-length studies of Cooper's work make the obligatory remarks on all of his fiction, but not until Thomas Philbrick's James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction,⁵ in 1961, did the nautical tales receive any concentrated attention. Yet Philbrick's work is a close study of only three of these novels, and his interest is mainly with the technical details and genre definition of the books and how Cooper's sea fiction compares with that of Byron, Smollet, Dana, and Melville. Moreover, although his study is invaluable, Philbrick attempts no identification of

the thematic links among the eleven novels, nor does he examine the specific attitudes and ideas Cooper thought suitable for expression in this new genre.

. Thus an area of Cooper's work in need of further analysis is one limited to only the nautical novels, an analysis which examines whatever thematic connection there is between these books written from 1824 to 1849. More specifically, how do we account for the obvious progression toward realism in character, plot, and thematic treatment from the early to the later tales? The early novels, from The Pilot to The Two Admirals, are romantic and picaresque, with miraculous events, set in provincial and usually pre-revolutionary times. The later books reveal a more realistic, novelistic approach to the characters and action because Cooper came gradually to use the nautical genre as a vehicle for universal themes.

Considered chronologically, Cooper's fictional works exhibit a development in the principal characters from romantic, idealized heroes whose conflicts--involving pre-revolutionary patriotism versus legal and social restraints--are finally resolved unambiguously and totally, to characters with deeper, less simple, and more engaging conflicts within themselves over religious and moral issues of universal application and interest. So Cooper's nautical fiction develops chronologically from provincial to universal themes, culminating, in his best books,

in characters who experience, in the broad expanse of nature at mid-ocean and other exotic locales, dark nights of the soul. We move from characters so trusting in their own, and thus human, self-sufficiency that they do not worry over their own limits or over the mystery of creation, to characters who are caught up in quests of self-identity, and cosmic identity--who seek their place and thus man's in the universal order of things. In these works, the sea voyage is not only more realistically depicted, but it clearly becomes symbolic and allegorical. The protagonists suffer physical, mental, and emotional deprivation and loss of a kind alien to the mood and spirit of the early novels, until they reach a pure form of Christian humility and a new perspective from which to view the social, moral, and religious life of man.

This overview of the thematic progression in Cooper's sea novels agrees with the general interpretation of his later work as dark, disillusioned, and pessimistic. Yet to regard the mature Cooper as something of a misanthrope is a too narrow conclusion. It is true that his later novels border on tragedy, but as in all great tragedy, there is the final affirmation of man's ability to survive and of the meaning and value of life.

By restricting my detailed analyses to these late novels I am not claiming that the early sea novels are without moral themes; indeed not, for Cooper was a

profoundly moral and religious writer throughout his career, one of the few in the history of American literature. As James Beard points out, Cooper conceived of fictional works as "formidable weapons in the cause of morality,"⁶ a cause which Cooper considered man's most important, as the Leatherstocking novels with their secular saint Natty Bumppo so eloquently testify. Cooper is close to Hawthorne with Natty in that the Indians often do represent a palpable evil lurking about in the garden of the new world. But in the later sea novels Cooper's vision resembles Henry James's rather than Hawthorne's, for he sees men erring when they become convinced of the finality of their own personal versions of reality. Just as James clearly regards the Emersonian solipsism of John Marcher as a sin, Cooper also considers man's attempt to know some ultimate reality other than God (and here he begins to be distinguishable from James) as a sin. The nefarious and morally complex world of James's fiction is more than Cooper could imagine, yet in Cooper's best sea fiction--Wing-and-Wing, Afloat and Ashore, and The Sea Lions--men are revealed as blind to their own limits; the powers of sight and reason prove fallible, and they must give up all pretense at mortal truth and, instead, seek God in complete humility and faith. It will be worthwhile to study this theme in Cooper's sea novels to discover what specific uses the ocean and other natural

phenomena indigenous to the nautical genre were to him, and to seek an explanation for why so many of his last works have a maritime setting, namely, that these settings provide grand stages for the religious dramas so readily available symbolically with the becalmed or bestormed ship.

An understanding of the thematic and symbolic function of the maritime setting is the main justification for studying Cooper's sea fiction by itself. And if such a study as this one seems to suffer for not linking the sea fiction with the rest of his work, I should point out that this has already been done in the book-length studies. One of my goals is to show that, after many attempts, Cooper was able to make as fine and relevant a use of his nautical settings as vehicles for themes as he does of forests and prairies to express his great theme of the virgin American and its Adam.

I must be quick, however, to clarify and limit what is meant by "sea fiction," for in all of the novels discussed in this paper at least half of the action takes place ashore. Moreover, there are nautical aspects in other of Cooper's novels, notably in The Bravo and The Pathfinder. But what are here considered as sea novels are those in which we find a conscious effort to present realistic and accurate details of life at sea and a distinct portrayal of seamen. In these novels our

attention is directed alternately at the ocean and the ship, and this shifting focus occurs especially in the later and better sea novels after Cooper had discovered more resources of the genre. Such studies as Donald Ringe's The Pictorial Mode and R. W. B. Lewis' The American Adam present strong arguments for the thematic and symbolic value of setting in Cooper's fiction. It does not matter that one sea novel is set in the English Channel, another in the Mediterranean, and yet another along the American coast, and that there are some which carry us all over the globe. We will encounter a trend and pattern within Cooper's sea tales, for the nautical genre in the early novels has a severely limited function and purpose, when it has one at all. In the later works Cooper approaches the use Melville and Conrad, both conscious acknowledgers of Cooper's fathering the genre, later make of the sea and men's journeyings upon it. If his early novels stress the separateness of seamen from the rest of mankind, the later works reveal that men, no matter what the locale, are subject to the same pitfalls, problems, and yearnings, and have the same spiritual dimension in need of nourishment, no matter how much or often they profess the contrary.

One special case of the sea novels involves the frequently mentioned major deficiency of Cooper as novelist: he often fails to unite his moral and spiritual

impulse with his desire to produce entertaining adventure. Even in the Leatherstocking series one discovers rifts between action and idea. Because Cooper initially conceived of the nautical tale as primarily one of adventure, it at first offered a great obstacle to the artistically satisfying interweaving of a moral message that he considered the goal of fiction. We will discover that the more realistic novels usually achieve a unity of plot and theme that the early ones do not. Indeed, in such early tales as The Water-Witch, there appears little compelling reason for the use of the nautical setting. Apparently Cooper himself only gradually realized that the nautical genre was a means to a fictional end, and not the end itself, and he did much experimenting before he saw how this new setting for fictional tales could best function as one of the "formidable weapons in the cause of morality."

A brief treatment of Cooper's first five sea novels in the following chapter will investigate what initial use he made of the nautical genre and will show that while these books are not without moral and religious aspects, the actions of The Pilot and The Red Rover, for example, do not build, as in the later stories, to a moral crisis and turning point. The awareness of man's limits, of his being the Popean "Glory, jest, and riddle of the world," is singularly alien to the romantic and idealistic

spirit of Cooper's early, nationalistic novels. And while he does not totally abandon his nationalistic themes in the later works, Cooper uses them later to illustrate not the glory of this new nation, but the general moral collapse of America and the need, as his characters experience it, of spiritual rebirth. I will treat the first five novels--The Pilot (1824), The Red Rover (1828), The Water-Witch (1830), Homeward Bound (1838), and The Two Admirals (1842)--only briefly, for they deserve and can stand only limited attention as works of art. Thus the later novels will be considered either singularly, in the case of Cooper's triumphs--Wing-and-Wing (1842), Afloat and Ashore (1844), and The Sea Lions (1849)--or as a brief closing group and out of chronological order, two novels of distinctly lesser achievement, Ned Myers (1843) and Jack Tier (1848). These last two books do at least offer innovations and are departures in various ways from the typical Cooper nautical novel.⁷

End-notes

- 1
James Fenimore Cooper, The Water-Witch (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, n.d.), p. 245.
- 2
Warren Walker, in his preface to The Sea Lions; or The Lost Sealers (1860; rpt. Lincoln, Nebraska: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. vii.
- 3
Yvor Winters, Maule's Curse (Norfolk: New Directions, 1938), p. 49.
- 4
D. E. S. Maxwell, American Fiction: The Intellectual Background (New York, 1963); A. N. Kaul, The American Vision: Actual and Ideal Society in Nineteenth Century Fiction (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1963); Earnest Leisy, The American Historical Novel, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950).
- 5
Thomas Philbrick, James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1961).
- 6
James F. Beard, ed. The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press 1964), I, xix. All references to Cooper's correspondence are to this edition, hereafter cited as Letters and Journals.
- 7
I have elected to omit one of Cooper's nautical tales from my study. Mercedes of Castile (1840) seems to me nearly impossible to read with any enjoyment or interest. It is a sincere attempt by Cooper to give an historically accurate account of Columbus's voyage to America, but this worthwhile idea is not well executed, as Cooper hopelessly clutters the novel with irrelevancies. Thomas Philbrick presents a brief analysis of this novel in his James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction, pp. 125-26; and H. Phinit-Akson analyzes the book's religious content in her dissertation, "James Fenimore Cooper: A Critical Study of His Religious Vision," Univ. of Pittsburg, 1973.

II. The Early Sea Novels, 1824-1842

"It is said there is no original literature in this country. Where is the model for The Pilot to be found?"⁸

The initial impetus for Cooper's nautical fiction in general and for The Pilot in particular is a well-known story. At a party one evening he became irked at the praise being heaped on Sir Walter Scott's The Pirate. Drawing on his brief career as an American naval officer, Cooper argued that Scott's nautical details were not accurate and implied that he could do better. In fact, in his preface to The Pilot, Cooper announces that his purpose in the novel is to "present truer pictures of the ocean and ships than any that are to be found in The Pirate."⁹ That he accomplished this goal there is no question; indeed, there is so much nautical jargon as to leave an unskilled reader befuddled. However, it is equally true that Cooper's first contribution to this new genre is not a successful novel.

The Pilot is not an entertaining or engrossing adventure, and Cooper so overdoes and repeats the moral crisis with which he attempts to hold the book together that the extended debate on the meaning of the American Revolution becomes tedious. The action on land, of which there is an excess, is confused and overly complex in its intrigue. Many of Cooper's friends argued with him

before his attempt at a sea story that readers would not find it interesting, at least not its technical details, and that women would not enjoy so ungenteel a subject. Comparing this fact with the author's assertion that his "aim was to illustrate vessels and the ocean rather than to draw any pictures of sentiment and love" (viii), one is led to speculate that while this last remark may have been Cooper's intent early, he cluttered The Pilot with three love plots, perhaps to make it more appealing to his female audience. Moreover, only a small part of the novel "illustrates vessels" and hardly any of it "the ocean," as most of the action takes place near the English coast, and there are no voyages.

The novel opens with two American men-of-war ships approaching the English coast. Their mission, modeled on a historical episode involving John Paul Jones, is to capture hostages to be used as leverage to protect Americans who are prisoners of the English. The English commander in the area, Colonel Howard, has recently returned to England from America out of revulsion for the colonial revolution. With him he has brought his two wards, Cecilia Howard and Katherine Plowden. These two ladies, we soon learn, are romantically interested in two American officers, Captain Barnstable and Lieutenant Griffith, who are part of the crews of the two ships. Once Cooper acquaints us with these four principals,

much of the rest of the action involves the American's attempts to spirit the ladies away from Howard and his dastardly underling, Christopher Dillon. The two American officers and the titular character, modeled on John Paul Jones, are incarcerated by the English, they escape, and the chase is on.

The novel's central theme and the conflict on which Cooper depends for unity and coherence of action ashore and afloat is a kind of debate over the meaning and morality of the American revolution. Is America the land of liberty it claims to be, or is the Congress tyrannical and oppressive? Is the English flag the "emblem of tyranny" as the Pilot argues? Both groups of characters are polarized by this issue and spend much of their time trying to convince one another of the merits of the revolution versus obedience, and of freedom versus authority. Cooper's unmistakable purpose is to present the case for the American cause. As a result the characters are stagey and wooden, stereotypes who act out whatever ideas they represent. The military struggles are idealized: there is always "warm and spirited" action on both sides, and the British and American seamen are at every occasion eager to take part in glorious and bloody battle (p. 155). The tone and temper of the book is conveyed by the mysterious and secretive Pilot as he speaks to one of his zealous officers: "Were your cause

less holy, I would not shed the meanest drop that flows in English veins, to serve it; but now, it hallows every exploit that is undertaken in its favor, and the names of all who contend for it shall belong to posterity. Is there no merit as touching these islanders that the arm of liberty can pluck them from the very empire of their corruption and oppression?" (p. 165). The religious imagery of this remark reveals the Americans' belief that they are fighting with God on their side as well as Cooper's tendency to enlist the Divinity for the characters and causes he favors.

It is no surprise that the Americans have the better of the intellectual disputes and the military struggles. One episode neatly illustrates the comparison-contrast Cooper develops between the camps. Long Tom Coffin, the epitome of the American tar, born with harpoon in hand it seems, at one point in the action occupies a small launch during a violent storm with Christopher Dillon, the English villain. With death almost certain for the two men, Tom is calm and resigned while Dillon is livid: "Had you Dillon thought more of Him in fair weather your cause would be pitied in this tempest" (p. 224). Tom is ready to perish "if it should be the will of God." "'I am not ready to die!--I cannot die!--I will not die!'" shrieks Dillon. "'If you are about to strive for your life, take with ye a stout heart and a clean conscience,

and trust the rest to God!' 'God!' . . . 'I know no God!'" (p. 225). Such a simple dichotomy between these two representatives causes the national struggle involved to appear to be a religious one, which is, historically, not correct.

Again Cooper brings God into the American cause, making the revolutionary struggle a holy one, though obviously in a most superficial manner, when the mortally wounded Colonel Howard delivers this surrender: "' . . . it seemeth to be the will of God that this rebellion should triumph, and it is not for vain man to impeach the acts of Omnipotence. To my erring faculties, it wears an appearance of mystery, but doubtless it is to answer the purpose of his own inscrutable providence. . . . I am forced to believe that it is the pleasure of Heaven that you are to prevail'" (pp. 324-25). One wonders about the intellectual honesty and artistic integrity of putting such set speeches into a character's mouth.

Despite Long Tom's apparent willingness to give up all to God in the storm scene, the seamen of The Pilot are confident and self-reliant. No task seems beyond their skills, and human limits, at least for the colonists, are non-existent. Such extreme confidence in the human will and blindness to or ignorance of limits on man's capacities is a central trait of all the early sea novels. If the cause is right as Cooper clearly believes

the Americans' is, and if the hearts are pure, as Coffin, Barnstable, and Griffth's are, anything is within reach. As we proceed chronologically through these novels, however, self-reliance will become selfishness, and independence will become blinding and dangerous pride. With so much optimism in The Pilot, there is no major thrust toward man's converting to a religious state, nor is there any pressing need for him to recognize and confess his dependent and limited existence.

More generally, various elements of The Pilot do not cohere and coalesce. The appearance of the standard Cooper women--moral paragons who are in trouble--and the obligatory love scenes have too little to do with Cooper's serious purpose and with the thematic issues of the story. Indeed, what begins as a military and ideological struggle between the British and American quickly degenerates into an unlikely contest for the women.

As a sea novel, the book is difficult to judge, for the naval action has little bearing on Cooper's overall purpose. The ships, sailors, and ocean clearly are not requisite here. An army would do as well, for the issue of authority and obedience within a hierarchical society does not demand a ship's environment. Cooper does present realistic and accurate details of life aboard ship and, after all, this was his announced purpose. But nautical matters have no other reason for being in

The Pilot. Cooper makes the seamen appear as a distinct group by characterizing them as landless, but this is overdone to the point of their seeming unnecessarily otherworldly, and to what end does such characterization lead? The old salts, with their overloaded jargon and tales of sea exploits, seem present only for their novelty, only for themselves. This is the only one of Cooper's sea novels, except for Water-Witch, in which the chief elements of the genre have such a limited function and in which setting has so little significance.

The most famous and discussed aspect of The Pilot is the character Long Tom Coffin, for here is born, it is argued, the common American sailor. Though common, Tom is an expert at his nautical crafts, and as Kay Seymore House points out, his skills earn him privileges and respect.¹⁰ One privilege seems to be the right to bore the audience with long, unlikely accounts of his exploits and with his overdone homespun honesty and morality. While Thomas Philbrick claims Tom is characterized "convincingly" and "forcefully,"¹¹ James Grossman is nearer the truth when he objects to Tom's being "too much the product of mechanical extravagance presented more as a marine animal exotic in its simplicity than as a man."¹² House sees Tom as "a human link with the natural world"¹³ for the rest of the characters, but Tom is too unconvincing as a human portrait to be taken seriously. And

while George Dekker calls him a "brilliant caricature" and the one bright spot in the book,¹⁴ such a judgement must rest only on Tom's novelty and originality as a fictional character, not on his actual performance in the story.

Donald Ringe makes the important point that though Cooper does not solve the dilemma posed by the American experience-- that is the dilemma posed by freedom of action and thought within a democracy versus the danger of "unrestrained human beings" blinded by passions, the will, and the self-- still he presents in Tom a representative of moral principle who with Leatherstocking and Harvey Birch (The Spy) "provide a moral undercurrent that forms a thematic thread in each book and that serves as a kind of touchstone of principle. . . ." These characters "exhibit the deep humility and the self-discipline, derived from their religious view of life. . . ." ¹⁵ (The characters who should be emphasized in this context are Cooper's women, for they are the most consistent moral touchstone.) The major obstacle to our accepting Long Tom in such an important role is his lack of believability. Yet although Ringe's point is not particularly applicable to The Pilot, it will certainly become a key one in the moral conflicts of the later sea novels, especially Afloat and Ashore and The Sea Lions. In fact, except for

Cooper's feeble attempt to make the American-British struggle a religious one, there is no religious theme in The Pilot, nor is there any developed character conflict that is religious. This absence marks The Pilot as early Cooper sea fiction, just as the heavily religious content of the novel's preface reflects the 1849 composition date of the preface.¹⁶

The Pilot is a romantic novel of swash-buckling adventure and derring-do whose central male figures overflow with courage, honesty, pride, and loyalty to a cause. Despite deaths and strife in the story, the world Cooper depicts in The Pilot is uncomplex and unambiguous. The novel's action is picaresque, and the titular character is Byronic in his brooding and glamour. Most of these characteristics are readily evident in Cooper's next two novels of the sea, The Red Rover and The Water-Witch, whose protagonists are simply versions of the Pilot.

Cooper perhaps saw The Pilot as a flawed effort, or at least he saw that nautical fiction offered many possibilities he had not tapped in his first contribution to this new genre. In a letter to Henry Colburn in 1826, after he had written The Prairie, Cooper remarks that "I intend the next book to be nautical, for I never was finished with The Pilot--myself--."¹⁷ And it is soon obvious as one reads The Red Rover that Cooper has

sharpened his skills significantly. For one thing, he reduces the main characters to two, the Rover and Henry Wilder, protagonist and antagonist. Though it has twists and turns, the plot is simpler than that of The Pilot, and the love intrigues fewer, for there is only one female romantically involved. Cooper also discovered with this story that a maritime setting some years before the revolution offered pirates as characters which in turn offered various possibilities for moral complications.

Set on the American coast, the story deals with the pursuit of the famous pirate by the British, whose ships he primarily preys on. The book opens with a mysterious ship standing in the New York harbor while rumors circulate that, though disguised as a slaver, it is the Rover's. Cooper uses skillful and subtle irony in showing the inhabitants unperturbed at a slaver but outraged at the thought of a pirate ship.¹⁸ Wilder, himself mysterious, is on shore and through a series of incidents is approached by the ship's captain, who is indeed the Rover, and asked to join the pirate band. This Wilder does, but he has in the meantime become acquainted with a Mrs. de Lacy, an admiral's widow, and her ward, Miss Gertrude Grayson, who, with Mrs. Wyllys as chaperon, are preparing to sail on a British ship waiting to leave from the same harbor. Now that Wilder knows the mysterious ship is the Rover's, he tries to dissuade the ladies from sailing. They persist,

however, and the plot shifts to focus on Wilder's attempts to save the ladies from an encounter with the pirate.

One could easily overstate the case for this novel, for it deals on one level with the reliability of objective reality and of man's ability to perceive it, and the difficulty of distinguishing between appearance and reality. The ship is not what it seems to be, nor is the Rover himself. In the gossip about him he is characterized as a devil, a monster. But we discover him to be instead a gentleman, debonair and charming, with quarters aboard his ship, the Dolphin, that are luxurious and sumptuous. The Rover is fond of music, painting, and exceedingly gentle with women; we ask, Is this a pirate? At this stage in his novels Cooper probably could not have created a truly mean and vile pirate, as he will later with Jack Tier. The Rover is romantic, idealized, and airy. The serious question posed by the sort of man the Rover actually is brings up Cooper's maritime nationalism theme, for the pirate is a pirate to the English, but to many of the Americans he is something of a hero. We are back, then, to one of the issues The Pilot touched on: are the Rover's activities illegal? Will the colonists' cause be legal at the time of the revolution? What moral criteria does one use to judge the Rover, who has been an "outlaw for patriotic reasons"?¹⁹

Before considering this question, we must first look at the other, climactic reversals of fortune and twists of the appearance-reality theme. All of the major characters are something other than what they seem. Wilder is actually Lieutenant Henry Ark--who was originally a foundling, as so many of Cooper's male characters are--a British officer sent by his commander to locate and maneuver a capture of the Rover. The Rover reveals that his true identity is Captain Heidegger, a man without a country because he has killed an English officer who insulted the colonies. The penultimate action of the novel is a battle between Heidegger's forces and the British, who have both Wilder and the ladies aboard. Though the pirates win this engagement, the Rover will not abide his unruly crew's thirst for revenge--it offends his sensibilities--so he sets fire to his own ship. The ultimate scene occurs some twenty years later. In this ill-chosen, unlikely epilogue we see an older, dying Rover brought to Ark's home. Ark by now has been further revealed to be Mrs. de Lacy's son, and he is now married to Gertrude, who is actually Mrs. Wyllys' daughter. The final surprise occurs when the Rover turns out to be Mrs. Wyllys' brother, thus Gertrude's uncle. How deceptive, indeed, is life! In the final scene the Rover stands up, unfurling the stars and stripes, saying, with his dying breath, "'Wilder' . . . We have triumphed."²⁰

By having the famous pirate discovered to be both a fine gentlemen and, finally, a patriot, Cooper cheats on the moral inconsistency that had previously existed in the person of the Rover. Grossman believes this final unveiling represents Cooper's attempt to redeem not the pirate's but the reader's morality, to give us "some excuse for liking a gentlemanly villain"; but this "has the effect of destroying one of the serious and ironic themes of the novel, our own delight in the spectacle of polite wickedness."²¹

A complex moral issue offered by a pirate crew involves law on the ship: that is, how can there be law on the ship when the whole group exists in a state of lawlessness? When the crew of the Dolphin attempt to dispatch the captured English, they claim this must be done according to "The Law." To this Mrs. Wyllys, whose ideas Cooper seems to approve of, vehemently responds: "The law! . . . Can they who set all order at defiance, who despise each human regulation, talk of law? Say it is heartless vindictive vengeance, if you will; but call it not by the sacred name of law" (p. 501). Typically, Cooper's women provide balance when immorality is rampant.

These interesting paradoxes, moral and legal, are abundant in The Red Rover, and abundant primarily because of Cooper's choice of a naval, pre-revolutionary setting. We are seeing Cooper build on what he began in

The Pilot, and there are many similarities between these first two books. The characters and action are romantic, the women pure, the heroes larger than life, and the sailors on both sides ebullient with self-sacrifice. The Rover is at times noble beyond belief, as when he pledges his honor to Wilder that he will protect Gertude's purity while she is aboard the Dolphin: "Before harm should come to that fair innocent, with this hand would I put the match into the magazine, and send her, all spotless as she is, to the place from which she seems to have fallen" (p. 349). We are reminded of Colonel Howard's insight into the religious rightness of the colonists in The Pilot when the British chaplain, after the Rover's defeat of the English, chastizes the Rover as "'remorseless violator of the laws of man! audacious contemner of the mandates of your God! . . . Though its awful justice be hidden in inscrutable wisdom, for a time, deceive not thyself; the hour is at hand when it shall be seen and felt in majesty!'" (p. 500). We who have seen the Rover in private moments know that this diatribe is excessive and that he does not represent a threat to christian society even though he exists outside the pale of British law.

This harangue notwithstanding, there is no central religious theme in The Red Rover, nor religious doubting and questioning, nor religious conversions. The conflicts of the novel, though involving many moral dilemmas, are

clearly focused on the individual and the rebel versus society. Wilder says his goal is to "lead him /Heidegger back into the bosom of society" (p. 408). Wilder's British captain observes about the Rover that "'Had he but the commission of the King in his pocket, one might call him a hero!'" (p. 485). An interesting exchange takes place between Wilder, Heidegger, and Mrs. Wyllys after the Rover has discovered that Wilder is actually Henry Ark, thus, to the pirate, a traitor. He tells Wilder that "'there is a law which binds together this community, into which you have so treacherously stolen . . .'" (p. 451). But Mrs. Wyllys, a voice for reason, religion, and order throughout, interrupts: "'You have forgotten the ties which bind man to his fellows. . . . by that holy and omniscient Being who suffers not a hair of the innocent to go unrevenged, I conjure you to pause, before you forget your own awful responsibility. . . . The laws of God are with him . . . 'tis reason that speaks in my voice; 'tis mercy, which I know is pleading at your heart. The cause, the motive, sanctify his acts; while your career can find justification in the laws neither of heaven nor earth'" (p. 451). Most interesting in this passage is the identification it forces us to make between the protagonist and antagonist. They are in fact involved in similar endeavors, but within different moral and legal frameworks. Cooper is dealing with the complex problem

of perspective and the difficulty of making moral judgments, the difficulty of evaluating objective reality due to the quagmirish nature of the human experience. While Mrs. Wyllys seems to have no such difficulty, by the end of the novel the Rover will be discovered to have been before his time with his cause, and the rightness of the colonial rebellion will be recognized by all.

Kay House explains that the Rover cannot know himself because he is "unsupported by religion or allegiance to the institutions of a settled homeland. . . ."22 But Wilder, the Rover's double in certain ways, has all the social and moral links the pirate lacks. It seems likely that Cooper intends these mirror-characters only as foils for each other rather than a more sophisticated treatment of two sides of a personality or some other doppelganger technique. But in his later nautical fiction he does use a more complex character splitting worthy of comparison with Conrad's in The Secret Sharer. What we can claim for Cooper at this early point is that he was feeling his way toward using the voyage motif, abundantly available in sea fiction, as a symbolic and unifying device. He not only uses a doppelganger theme in both Afloat and Ashore and The Sea Lions to investigate the intermingling of life and death impulses and the various responses available when man is called to an existential account of himself, but he also employs a carefully developed symbolic voyage

of life. The early sea novels, certainly the first five, lack this multiplicity and suffer for their routine and simplified conflicts. The early, provincial themes, especially maritime nationalism, will give way to a scrutiny of man's voyage through life, his experiences and education, and the insight into himself and his place in the universe that he gains or fails to gain.

What also distinguishes the early from the later sea novels is illustrated by the incomplete conclusions Cooper reaches in The Red Rover. Although we have Mrs. Wyllys as a representative for some final, highest reality, she is not a convincing character, she fails to influence either Wilder or Heidegger, and a modern audience will find her pious platitudes annoying. Moreover, whereas the characters with a religious function in the novels--Mrs. Wyllys in The Red Rover and Long Tom in The Pilot--are minor and overdrawn, the major characters are not involved in religious struggles, being too caught up with patriotic and social problems. We do not find in these early novels any radical transformation in character, no truly anguished questioning into the enigmatic nature of reality. Cooper's audience perceives, perhaps too incompletely, the need for some unifying, higher reality--ultimately God--but the characters undergo nothing of the dark night of the soul as do Miles Wallingford and other later characters.

One incident in The Red Rover exemplifies the difference between the major characters of the early and late sea novels as they relate to the religious theme that will become Cooper's grand theme, of man's recognitions of his finitude and ultimate and utter dependency on God. Early in the story, Wilder as captain of the British Caroline is being pursued by the Rover in the Dolphin. The latter ship strikes fear into Wilder's crew, who believe it to be a mystery ship after the manner of The Flying Dutchman. Although Wilder tries first to cajole and then to coerce them into remaining, the crew mutinies and abandons the ship: "As the young mariner Wilder looked understandingly about him, he cursed, in the bitterness of his heart, the ignorance and superstition that had caused the desertion of the crew. There existed, in reality, no evil that exertion and skill could not have remedied" (p. 287). Wilder is, of course, correct. But the belief expressed here that skill and exertion can overcome any evil confronting them is a species of optimism in man and his cognitive and physical abilities, especially his ability to know the truth, that will provide for the irony in the stories of Hawthorne and Henry James. Indeed, so too will Cooper come to see the existence of evil in the world that man, alone, cannot effectively combat. These naive and self-confident early heroes will give way to thinking, and, therefore, suffering

men; and this shift will mark Cooper's passage from pure romanticism to more realistic characters and situations. His use of a naval setting will be valuable in this endeavor, because men aboard a becalmed ship or "adrift on a slim spar" frequently find themselves in positions of self-confrontation and self-knowledge. As Philbrick observes, whereas Natty's expertise can always handle the situations he encounters on land, the expert seamen aboard ship cannot, for the ocean is too overwhelming a force.²³ When Wilder and the two women find themselves in a small launch a short time after the mutiny, "On every side lay seemingly illimitable waste of waters" (p. 291). In such a setting, man's attention is undistracted by the artificial accoutrements of civilization. He is immediately confronted with a problematic existence. Cooper will latter exploit such moments available in the nautical genre for the best and most profound scenes of his novels.

Most critics have found The Red Rover to be an uneven performance. Dekker judges that as a maritime adventure, "it is probably Cooper's best," yet the "unravelling of the plot is as melodramatic as it is improbable." Worse yet, Dekker adds, "its theme and action are not well integrated."²⁴ These judgements cannot be disputed. Ringe seconds Charles Brady's verdict that The Red Rover is a "'gay sea pastoral' in which romantic adventure is

its sole excuse for being."²⁵ Grossman argues that Cooper intended his subject to be "the ability of decent, attractive people to engage in an evil life"; but Cooper disallowed and spoiled this plan with the novel's stagey denouement.²⁶ Philbrick's is the longest analysis of the novel, yet he is too limiting with his discussion of the novel's theme as the "doctrine of maritime nationalism." While we have seen this as a unifying and general theme in Cooper's early sea novels, if we focus on maritime nationalism as the central issue in The Red Rover, we must agree with its other readers and judge it harshly, for Heidegger as an early revolutionary and his "revelation" in the book's final scene are too contrived to be taken very seriously.²⁷ I think Philbrick's general notion that the first three novels form a "trilogy depicting the growth of the separation between America and England and the slow awakening of an American national consciousness"²⁸ misses what the revolutionary setting offered to Cooper. It is not patriotism that these works are studying, although Cooper clearly was patriotic himself. What appealed to him were the conflicting loyalties and the moral conflicts that surely developed when a once whole body became split into two antagonistic groups. Cooper treats this same idea in an analogous situation fourteen years later in The Two Admirals.

We should not leave The Red Rover without noting Cooper's remark in a letter to his publishers, Carey, Lea, and Carey: "In point of characters and dramatic dialogue the first and last volumes, (English) [Sic] are certainly the best things I have written. As to the nautical descriptions I could write a quire of them in a week-- as a whole I perfectly agree with you in thinking it the best book, but there is still plenty of room for improvement, which is an advantage we enjoy over some other writers."²⁹ True, but Cooper was not to effect much improvement in his nautical tales until after two more uneven contributions to this genre.

Cooper called The Water-Witch, his next sea novel, "the most comely of the family,"³⁰ but he might also have termed it a bastardizing of The Red Rover, a difficult book to read, and, but for one aspect, a book without sufficient reason for being! The Water-Witch is another mysterious and allusive ship, to the point of seeming magical and supernatural, piloted by the Skimmer of the Seas, who is largely a carbon copy of the Rover though somewhat less Byronic. The Skimmer is pursued for most of the story by Captain Ludlow, the captain of a British cruiser. Ludlow is an overly serious bore obsessed with capturing the Skimmer who as a smuggler cheats the English out of duties due them. The Skimmer sells his plunder to Alderman Myndert van Beverout, whose

characterization is what Yvor Winters finds so praiseworthy in The Water-Witch.

The Alderman is indeed an interesting and entertaining creation, a mixture of materialism and greed that looks ahead to characters in The Sea Lions and Jack Tier. But he is not evil. He has a certain harmless air about him which makes him an amusing villain. Yet the Alderman's use of mercantile language and metaphors--which reminds us of Shakespeare's Shylock--is an effective, hyperbolic touch of social criticism of American values that Cooper treats more fully in the Home novels. The Alderman tells his niece Alida de Barberie, for whom Ludlow is thoroughly lovesick, "that matrimony is no more than a capital bargain."³¹ One of his maxims is that "your rich dealer is your honest dealer" (p. 118). When the Skimmer thinks of taking time off from pirating for hunting, the Alderman explains: "I had all the deer taken for the skins, ten years ago; and as to birds, they deserted us to a pigeon, when the last tribe of the savages went west of the Delaware" (p. 120). (The Pioneers had been published just seven years earlier.) He delivers these lines in such an unassuming way that it is difficult to be as outraged as one should.

We are reminded of Shylock's bemoaning Jessica's elopement when van Beverout discovers Alida gone. He has been trying to arrange a marriage between his niece

and a wealthy merchant, Oloff Van Staats: "'This is an unhappy world, Mr. Van Staats. All our calculations come to naught; and it is in the power of fortune to reverse the most reasonable and wisest of our expectations. . . . The girl has disappeared in order to enhance the value of her future submission. One should never regard a treaty at an end, so long as reasonable hopes remain that it may be productive to the parties.'" (p. 136). She is just so much portable property to the Alderman. And when it seems likely that Alida is aboard the smuggler's ship, her uncle is not concerned that her life may be in danger but because "When female reputation gets a bad name in the market, 'tis harder to dispose of than falling stock" (p. 173).

The same nationalistic purpose behind Cooper's creation of the patriot Red Rover is a part of the Skimmer's makeup, yet the Skimmer's persistent impulse to explain his motives and thus to make himself a moral though extralegal smuggler is too often not a part of the dramatic context. Without any narrative need to do so, the Skimmer will suddenly say: "' . . . that I sometimes trespass on the Queen's earnings is not to be denied, and least of all to you Alderman⁷; for I like neither this manner of ruling a nation by deputy, nor the principle which says that one bit of earth is to make laws for another" (p. 175). As Grossman pointed out about

the Rover, much of the character's charm is ruined by such explanations. In both of these novels Cooper's technique is the same: the pirates and smugglers are given nationalistic motives for their illegal behavior so as to make them agreeable to the contemporary audience of the book. Ironically, it was these very apologies which brought charges of immorality against these novels from their contemporary critics: "We are inclined to think, that if works of fiction have any influence on manners and morals--and if they have not, what are they good for?--such examples, held up as they are to the admiration of the reader, must give a wrong direction to the imagination of young people."³²

What particularly troubles a reader of The Water-Witch is Cooper's penchant--seen in most of his novels--for giving his characters long set speeches on specific issues which concerned the author. These usually interrupt the flow of the narrative and are evidence of the often mentioned discontinuity between the adventure sections of Cooper's novels and the moral or philosophical dimensions of them. We see Cooper undramatic and unmasked in this harangue delivered by the Skimmer of the Seas: To Captain Ludlow's "'I believe there is a mandate of sufficient antiquity, which bids us to render unto Ceasar the things which are Caesar's,'" the Skimmer says:

"A mandate which our modern Caesars have most liberally construed! I am a poor casuist, sir; not do I think the loyal commander of the Coquette would wish to uphold all that sophistry can invent on such a subject. If we begin with potentates, for instance, we shall find the Most Christian King bent on appropriating as many of his neighbors' goods to his own use, as ambition, under the name of glory, can covet. . . . The gallows awaits the pickpocket; but your robber under a pennant is dubbed a knight! The man who amasses wealth by gainful industry is ashamed of his origin; while he who has stolen from churches, laid villages under contribution, and cut throats, by thousands, to divide the spoils of a galleon or a military chest, has gained gold on the highway of glory! Europe has reached an exceeding pass of civilization, it may not be denied; but before society inflicts so severe censure on the acts of individuals, notwithstanding the triteness of the opinion, I must say it is bound to look more closely to the example it sets, in its collective character." (pp. 294-95)

Cooper's letters and journal entries for these years reveal his concern about the crucial position of Europe. In his fiction, of course, we would prefer that such ideas and concerns grow out of the narrative, not be imposed on it.

Religious themes in The Water-Witch are rendered in the manner of the first two sea novels: they are undeveloped, involve minor characters, and are obtrusive. During one of the book's battle sequences, with the tension growing as a fresh assault is expected by the British, one of Ludlow's crew asks him:

"What is your opinion, Captain Ludlow, concerning an afterlife, and of all those matters one occasionally hears of if he happens to drift in the way of a church?"

"The question is as broad as the ocean, my good friend, and a fitting answer might lead us into abstrusities deeper than any problem in our trigonometry. Was that the stroke of an oar?"

"'Twas a land noise. Well, I am no great navigator among the crooked channels of religion. Every new argument is a sand-bar, or a shoal, that obliges me to tack and stand off again. . . ." (p. 396)

It would be forcing matters to argue that Cooper means anything important with this unprofound analogy, and the juxtaposition of immediate and remote concerns is unintentionally humorous. In later sea novels, at a time when Cooper in his own life was becoming caught up in religious questions, such issues will become more the fabric and less the bauble of his stories. Typically, the women of The Water-Witch have most of the pious lines. Cooper even stereotypically refers to "woman's faith in that Divine Being," and Alida at one point during a battle gives herself up "'to the mercy of Him whose eye is over all!'" (p. 411).

Critical judgments seem more split on this novel than most of Cooper's others. Some readers, such as Donald Davie, Dekker, and House have been strongly influenced by Yvor Winters' early analysis of Cooper's work. While Winters does point out a few of the novel's flaws, his general impression is strongly favorable. Winters likens it to a comic opera and argues that "the style is adjusted to the plot in a manner at once

brilliant and meticulous. . . . it is probably Cooper's ablest piece of work, as it is certainly one of the most brilliant, if scarcely one of the most profound master-pieces of American prose."³³ Dekker seconds this judgment of Winters and claims that those contemporary American readers who did not like The Water-Witch--it was poorly received--"evidently were only baffled by the mature and delicate art of The Water-Witch."³⁴ Dekker praises the language for being "alive" and adds that "The inability of the public to appreciate the originality and poetic quality of this minor classic of American Literature foreshadows already the catastrophic reception of Moby Dick and The Confidence Man."³⁵ This argument gives too high a place for a novel that--but for the imaginative creation of the Dutch merchant--is simply a rehash of The Red Rover. And judging these novels for what they primarily are, tales of maritime adventure, the former is clearly the more successful.

Grossman, on the other hand, calls the plot absurd and finds the brigantine unsuccessful as a symbol for unreality.³⁶ Ringe seconds this opinion and sees the "supernatural elements grossly overdone"; in addition, "too much is realistically explained by Cooper to allow us to accept as fantasy those parts which are not."³⁷ Philbrick, wisely I think, has little to say about The Water-Witch.

These various remarks are ancillary as regards the thrust of my interest, the genre of the novel. The serious concerns of this third tale are squarely with van Beverout and the question of trade, what it is or ought to be, and a probing by Cooper into what may be the fate of a nation with avaricious merchants who grasp blindly at all portable property. It seems obvious that the book's poor reception in 1830 stemmed from the unpleasant portrait painted of American business and trade. We do not become involved with the Skimmer's motives or his lawlessness. Instead we look hard at the equally idealized but somehow more believable and alive Dutch merchant, who will buy and sell his own relations. But it is the Alderman's nonessential connection with the maritime aspect of The Water-Witch that makes the genre so superfluous here. While the close connection between mercantilism and smuggling appears to provide logical necessity for the nautical milieu, the naval characters, pursuits, and battles are among the weakest, least satisfying elements of this novel. Thus one may ask why not set the entire novel ashore, focusing exclusively on the Alderman, bringing in more of his associates to support or contrast with his character. Smuggling would then become but one area from which he would gather his illegal goods. More then could be done with corrupt political figures--which this novel attempts but covers

too sketchily--and the unsuccessful maritime nationalism of The Water-Witch could be dropped.

Why not some such differently written novel? One reason must be the popularity of The Pilot and The Red Rover; both Cooper and his publishers were merely trying to draw on the respectable following these first two books had gained, and we see in this third novel situations, conflicts, and characters very much like those of the first two. Another reason for Cooper's choosing the nautical genre for this novel was the great joy he felt at concocting adventure plots, and his ability to write them ad infinitum. The letters and journals for these years suggest yet a third reason for his interest in maritime settings. Cooper acted as a kind of lobbyist for and intended his books in part to speak for a stronger United States navy. He saw this as essential were the United States to be a global power, and he was jealous for America of certain navies, especially the British.³⁸ Cooper's next sea novel, The Two Admirals, in its praise of power and beauty of the British fleets suggests what America lacks.

In his 1852 essay "The Works of James Fenimore Cooper," Francis Parkman, in speaking of Cooper's sea tales, praises the wreck of the Ariel and the death of Long Tom Coffin in The Pilot and then concludes: "The Red Rover, The Water-Witch, and the remainder of the

sea tales, are marked with the same excellences and defects with the novels already mentioned, and further comments would therefore be useless."³⁹ What a succinct treatment of the ten novels! Yet Parkman's sweeping summation is oddly true, for Cooper's strengths and weaknesses were always with him, whether in the Leatherstocking, the nautical, or the other historical novels. But after these first three sea novels, Cooper gradually leaves provincial themes and routine plots and reaches for universal ones, tapping new uses for the nautical genre and putting it to various symbolic uses. The sea especially becomes less of an object that man merely sails on and more of a presence man may peer into or up from to better know his own place in the cosmos.

Although religious themes are still absent and provincial ones persist in Homeward Bound, his fourth sea novel, Cooper here employs the ship in a totally new and symbolic way. Gone from this novel is most of the swash-buckling maritime adventure, as well as the unsophisticated moral twinges involving pirates and smugglers with hearts of gold. And while there is considerable debate in the first of the Home novels over American institutions and values, the time of the story is many years after the Revolution, and the rightness of the colonial cause is not an issue. Despite this shift in emphasis, the action remains picaresque and Cooper's

idealized characters and caricatures are intact. Captain Truck of the packet Montauk is an earthy, honest American seaman comic in his verbal repetitions and excesses but nonetheless more amusing and likable than any we have thus far seen. Eve Effingham is a typical Cooper heroine who is virtuous, moral, virginal, and a stabilizing influence. The key male figures are Mr. Sharpe and Mr. Blunt, two coincidental pseudonyms for Paul Powis and Sir George Templemore, respectively, two true-hearted beau ideals. There are various disguises and mistaken identities such as those seen in the first novels, though thankfully no more of the anachronistic Shakespearean women disguised as men. Overall, however, Cooper's stock company of characters is present again.

With almost all of its action taking place aboard a ship on a voyage from England to America, Homeward Bound represents a significant departure from what Cooper had thus far attempted with the sea novel. This was the first voyage Cooper created, but this maritime device proved popular, and thereafter he used it often. He explains in the preface of the novel that his original intention was to carry the Effingham family to America, from which they had been absent for several years, and to focus the novel on what they found there, especially the changes that had taken place since their earlier residence there. Thus originally Homeward Bound was

not going to be a sea novel at all. But Cooper also tells us that "as a vessel was introduced in the first chapter, the cry was for 'more ship,' until the work has become 'all ship.'"40

Cooper mentions in the preface that he began Homeward Bound "with a sole view to exhibit the present State of society in the United States" (iii), and while the Montauk just reaches America at the novel's end, and thus the critical social scrutiny must wait for the sequel, Home As Found, virtually all of the dialogue is in the form of a debate on American institutions and values. In this way Cooper's fourth sea novel looks back to the technique of The Pilot. The debate pits the quasi-expatriate Effinghams, and especially the cosmopolitan Eve, against the most ridiculous character Cooper ever created, Steadfast Dodge, an American journalist. Dodge is like no other character yet encountered in Cooper's maritime fiction. The author's extreme distrust and hatred of journalists is well known and linked to the various lawsuits and unfavorable publicity Cooper saw himself suffering at their hands. Dodge is a pompous fool and as a supposed representative of provincial America is a decidedly unfair caricature.⁴¹ That Dodge looks ahead to characters of Mark Twain and Sinclair Lewis is true, but he is so absurd as to be beyond derisive laughter.

Yet Dodge represents, among other things, aspects of democracy that deeply troubled the aristocratic Cooper.

Dodge

came from a part of the country in which men were accustomed to think, act, almost to eat and drink and sleep, in common; or, in other words, from one of those regions in America, in which there was so much community, that few had the moral courage, even when they possessed the knowledge, and all the other necessary means, to cause their individuality to be respected. . . . and from his tenth year up to his twenty-fifth, this gentleman had been either a president, vice-president, manager, or committee-man, or some philosophical, political, or religious expedient to fortify human wisdom, make men better, and resist error and despotism. (p. 38)

Dodge is frequently heard to say that no other place in the world measures up to any in America, and thus he represents a species of blinding nationalism Cooper disapproved of. He balances Dodge with the well-traveled Effinghams, especially Eve--who is above any mean nationalism, for she knows several languages and has lived in various countries. D. H. Lawrence describes her as having "skimmed the cream off Europe." Yet the novel becomes tedious in the repetition of the arguments these characters engage in and especially because Dodge is always against the whole group. Thus these disputes are too one-sided to be interesting, and after a few chapters Dodge is a dead horse.

Dodge and Truck together offer a study of contrast too. Both Americans, Dodge is the joiner and committeeman

who believes that majority rule is correct for every situation. He even wants to form a committee aboard ship and vote, majority ruling, on the ship's course and the rightness of Truck's changing of course to meet new demands. Truck, on the other hand, is accustomed to relying on himself: he "knew that a ship could not safely have more than a single will" (p. 88). Dodge epitomizes the leveling influence Cooper feared in America as a threat to men of exceptional talent and individuality. The nautical novel was convenient for Cooper to explore this problem because on a ship strict discipline and obedience to superiors were essential--just as essential, of course, was the existence of superiors and a hierarchy. Poor Dodge attempts to defend the impossible proposition, supposedly the American ideal, that in America there exist "'Equal laws, equal rights, equality in all respects, and pure, abstract, unqualified liberty, beyond all question" (p. 96).

Although the various debates are one-sided and not very engaging, Cooper recognizes with Homeward Bound the potential for a symbolic ship to represent a cross section of society. He obviously stacks the deck, but his motive for setting this social tract on board a ship is to bring together various types of characters and people of different social stations, nationalities, occupations, and political persuasions. Where else could characters as divergent as Dodge, Truck, and the Effinghams

come together? This is not a Ship of Fools, but the allegory of Katherine Anne Porter has its literary roots in Cooper's early work just as surely as Melville's The Confidence Man does. We might also observe that Mark Twain's Innocents Abroad looks back to the absurd Dodge who reads from his journal about "'dejjunying'" in France, and his visit to "Notter Dam," about which he reports: "'Here I was painfully impressed with the irreligion of the structure, and the general absence of piety in the architecture. Idolatry abounded, and so did holy water'" (p. 197). Missed by the many readers and critics who attacked Cooper for creating such a creature devoid of taste and culture was the author's motive for his social criticism: he was not for shelving American institutions but, again like Mark Twain, for exposing those who misused and abused them and for revealing how susceptible they were to such treatment.

Infrequently in Homeward Bound Cooper touches on aspects of the ocean afforded passengers aboard such a ship as the Montauk which were ignored in the earlier novels mainly because those novels never carried us into the middle of the ocean. We also glimpse the power and reach of Cooper's prose and his fine use of images in his description of what the travelers experience as they approach the African coast in a small launch from the Montauk:

The solitary and gloomy grandeur of the coast, the sublime sterility,--for even naked sands may become sublime by their vastness,--the heavy moaning of the ocean on the beach, and the entire spectacle of the solitude, blended as it was with the associations of Africa, time, and the changes of history, united to produce sensations of a pleasing melancholy. The spectacle of the ship, bringing with it the images of European civilization, as it lay helpless and deserted on the sands, too heightened all. (p. 210)

And in other places Cooper handles well the sublimity of the ocean, its vastness and its overwhelming power as storms rage. But in the early novels such scenes are not integrated with the plots and themes and contribute only to mood and serve as diversions. We must wait for Cooper to use such scenes for religious purposes in novels in which the voyages take on something of the air of religious quests and in which man is made fearfully aware of his limits and of God's infinity by his experience at sea. In Homeward Bound, however, we are concerned with man's social place, not his cosmic one. The pride and smug selfishness exhibited by characters such as Dodge reveal them to be foolish bores--but later such behavior will be affront to God and to an ordered cosmos.

Religious content in this novel is limited to sentimental pieties that it hardly pays to dwell on. When the whole group is threatened with capture by Arabs on the African coast, everyone's concern is how to save Eve from a "fate worse than death" (p. 319). She

remains calm and tries to reassure her distraught parent: "Father, let us pray together. Ann, my good Ann, thou who first taught me to lisp a thanksgiving and a request, kneel here by my side--and you, too, Mademoiselle; though of a different creed, we have a common God! . . . Father . . . there is one precious hope of which even the barbarians cannot rob us: we may be separated here, but our final meeting rests only with God!" (pp. 320-21). When Blunt suggests they establish a common story ahead of time to tell the Arabs in the event of capture, Eve objects: "'Can anything be better than the holy truth? . . . No, no, no! Let us not deform this chastening act of God, by coloring any thought or word with deception'" (p. 315). Cooper wisely leaves the women ashore in the rest of his sea novels: here they will continue with this stultifying moralizing and overly simplistic and literal religious beliefs. Fortunately the important ocean action will involve us in less naive and more complex moral and religious issues without so many easy solutions.

Homeward Bound is a seriously flawed novel not because the maritime setting is inappropriate or insufficient but because the nautical adventure sections--one with a British man-of-war and another with the Arabs--and the social criticism sections have a cat-and-dog relationship. They are not integrated or unified and sometimes create unintentionally humorous situations. Weary from battle

with the Arabs, for example, the principal characters retire below deck and launch immediately into a discussion of American life and institutions. In this way the adventure sections take on an unreal and unimportant cast. Four novels later, Cooper is still unable to harmonize the wealth of adventurous situations available within the nautical framework with whatever theme--social, political, moral, or religious--the book attempts to explore. The result, says Ringe, is an "intellectually sound but artistically weak novel."⁴² Yet Homeward Bound has earned the distinction of being an early international novel of manners,⁴³ and we can agree with Grossman that this is "one of Cooper's freshest books," for, despite its structural faults, "the story is a good one."⁴⁴

Thomas Philbrick argues that the shift toward realism which Homeward Bound represents by not having glamorous heroes and outlaws in an eighteenth century setting is due in part to Richard Henry Dana's influence and the growing popularity of his realistic sea fiction. But the "realism" in this novel is only realistic as compared to Cooper's earlier nautical tales and certainly not in comparison with the grim and almost photographic realism of Two Years Before the Mast. Indeed, only two of Cooper's sea novels--Afloat and Ashore and The Sea Lions--approach the realism of Dana, and these were not less romantic and idealized out of imitation of Dana but because their

serious subjects required more realistic characters and treatment. I do not mean to argue that Cooper was not extremely sensitive to his audience, for certainly the sales of his books were one of his abiding concerns, and clearly he was bothered by the comparative failure of two of his romances, The Bravo and The Heidenmauer. But Cooper's subjects dictated the style of particular novels, as his constantly changing themes and vehicles for these suggest. The otherworldly, idealized characters and romantic situations of The Pilot, The Red Rover, and Water-Witch were simply not appropriate to the social criticisms of Homeward Bound.

The Two Admirals is the final early sea novel, and it returns us in time to Cooper's favorite romantic period, 1750, which was for him the slightly dim, heroic past. But this fifth sea novel is not just another Red Rover, for Cooper is for the first time focusing on an English issue, involving Americans only tangentially. The Two Admirals has been praised for the relatively sophisticated and realistic moral crisis undergone by Admiral Bluewater. His is a sincere and deep conflict, as we will see, but Cooper commits his old mistake of cheapening Bluewater's dilemma by a too easy and total resolution.

A summary of the action in this novel quickly reveals one of its faults: the action on shore, approximately the first half of the book, is only tenuously connected

with the second half of the novel, which takes place afloat. What is more, only two of the six major characters have any significant role in the novel's second half. Ashore the action centers on determining the rightful heir, legally and morally, of the Wychecombe estate. There are two elder Wychecombes whose unmarried dallies along with a Wychecombe imposter leave the question of succession a muddled affair. There is also an American sailor, young Wychecombe, who has lately distinguished himself with the British fleet against the French, though so far as anyone knows he is of no relation to the English Wychecombes. After Baron Wychecombes dies, his brother, Sir Wycherly Wychecombe, holds the estate together until he falls ill and decides on a new will. After three chapters of stammering speech Sir Wycherly finally disinherits Tom Wycherly, who is revealed to be but the bastard son of the dead Baron, and leaves most of the estate to a cousin Reginald. Shortly after this long-awaited development, however, we learn that the American is a legitimate son of one of the Wycherly brothers and, therefore, a rightful heir. This is the plot of the novel's first half.

During the resolution of this action we have become acquainted with Admirals Bluewater and Oakes, who have been houseguests at the Wychecombe estate and have helped in settling the heir question. It so happens that

Bluewater is a tory and Oakes a whig, and a rift develops when news is brought that Prince Charles Edward, son of the Pretender, Prince Charles, has come from Scotland to make an attempt on the English throne. The endless arguments over legitimate versus illegitimate heirs to the Wychembe estate and to the English throne make the symbolic function of the early plot clear, but there is too much repetitive dialogue and too many arguments over "fili nullorum."

After the resolution of the Wychembe plot the two admirals join their fleet and Oakes, the senior officer, goes to meet the French fleet while Bluewater awaits developments. We spend almost all of the novel's second half aboard with Oakes who, as the battle with the French goes badly, anxiously waits for Bluewater to act. Bluewater wants to be loyal to his lifelong friend Oakes, but he is also drawn by a sense of duty to join the Pretender's cause. Can he just throw Oakes to the French dogs? Oakes fears that he has done precisely that. However, Cooper drags out one of his patented nick-of-time endings, having Bluewater sailing triumphantly through the smoke-filled battle scene to save the day for the English fleet. Cooper regularly wastes interesting dramatic situations in these early novels with just such a phony and showy ending. Furthermore, rather than the narrative's being with Bluewater as he supposedly agonizes over the conflict

of loyalties, we remain all the while with Oakes; Cooper does this no doubt for suspense and in order to have the hoopla upon Bluewater's arrival. But the result is that an interesting personal drama is dissipated.

The Two Admirals has been applauded for the "mature" and "realistic" conflict that Bluewater undergoes. And while one does feel that Cooper is progressing toward a more sophisticated conflict, he still makes the issue in the novel too ideal by characterizing both men as being motivated by only first principles, neither by mean vanity, prejudice, or selfishness. This is the last of his sea novels in which the major characters have such pure and honorable motives.

The Two Admirals, I believe, has been overrated by most critics. I agree with Ringe's comment on this novel that he uses as a generalization about Cooper's later works: ". . . the resolution of the conflict is not so easily achieved; and the theme embodies a much more complex moral concept that any in Cooper's first tales."⁴⁵ But Cooper has not yet reached such sophistication in this fifth nautical story. It is true he withholds specific approval from Bluewater's decision to foresake his principles for love of friend and conditioned responsibility. This, some have argued, is evidence for the book's being a more complex story. But is there any serious doubt concerning Cooper's approval? Bluewater's entry into

the struggle is glorious; he saves the day; everyone involved bitterly mourns the fatal wound he suffers. There is little ambiguity in the mood of the climactic entry of the admiral: "Bluewater's loyalty to the Stuarts could resist no longer."⁴⁶ "The gratitude of Sir Gervaise Oakes, as the rescuing ship thrust herself in between him and his most formidable assailant was too deep for language. He . . . thanked God, with a fervor of spirit that never before had attended his thanksgiving" (p. 441). And we later discover that Bluewater rushed into battle, sword in hand, muttering something about lost honor and duty. His decision is without ambiguity. Ringe's claim that there is "no absurd heroism" in this novel is also questionable. How do we describe Bluewater's reaction in his last hours of life to the man who wounded him, that he "'did no more than his duty'" (p. 477)? Although Bluewater's divided loyalties are such that no decision will be completely satisfactory, and though a deeper conflict is presented than say, in Lionel Lincoln, where similar divided loyalties exist, still what is said of the Pretender and his claims after the admiral's decision? Nothing. These matters are not mentioned until the novel's epilogue, and only briefly then. The effect of this is similar to the effect of the events of the first half of the novel never being mentioned again: they take on an unimportant, artificial, and almost unreal character.

And when Bluewater later dies, one of his last remarks to Sir Gervaise expresses an uneasiness about the nature of human existence, but there is no consternation concerning his choice: "'Still, there will be no ships for us--no cruises--no victories--no triumphs! It is only at moments like this, at which I have arrived, that we come to view these things in their proper light. Of all the past, your constant, unwavering friendship gives me the most pleasure!'" (p. 481).

Both Ringe and Philbrick have stressed the uniqueness of The Two Admirals among Cooper's maritime novels. Its most important innovation is that character, rather than ship or ocean, receives the closest study and offers the most spectacle in the book. This is a fair claim, but we must restrict it to just the admirals, for all the other characters are routine, familiar types from earlier tales.

Important to the development of Cooper's fictional technique is his discovery with this novel that a nautical setting can offer more than physical spectacle. I am less impressed about the believability and realism of the conflict than many readers, yet Cooper is clearly presenting us with the most genuine complication to date in his sea fiction. Bluewater and Oakes are "credible human beings,"⁴⁷ and Cooper created none worthy of mention before The Two Admirals. However, Ringe overstates the world view suggested by this novel. Cooper is not yet

"distrusting the ability of fallible men to guide their destinies through the use of reason alone."⁴⁸ Contrary to Ringe's assertion, Cooper is still stressing patriotism as a kind of ideal as Bluewater's decision shows. Whereas we had a strictly social ship in Homeward Bound, thus provincial themes and clearly a theme with limited meaning, in The Two Admirals we shift from social to political, complicated by moral dilemmas, but the scope of the whole affair remains provincial; we are not encountering men who struggle with first questions of self and existence. Bluewater does not actually wrestle with such problems, and Cooper so mutes the final stages of his predicament by not allowing us access to his mind that his questioning lacks the intensity and interest of Cooper's best characters. Furthermore, except for the unconvincing fraud of the bastard Tom, there is not an ambiguous world, where little is as it seems, in The Two Admirals.

Finally, what is to be made of the odd and unexpected final scene of this novel? Many years after the few days' time of the story, we find ourselves in Westminster Abbey, where an old and senile Sir Gervaise Oakes has apparently come to visit Bluewater's tomb, though at first he is unable even to remember who Bluewater was. Why reveal the infirmity and senility of the man who was once so powerful and skillful? To suggest the theme of sic transit gloria mundi? Perhaps so, for young

Wycherly, who is also conveniently present in the Abbey, moans upon the spectacle of Oakes: "'For what do we live, if a few brief years are to tender our memories such vacant spots'" (p. 493). But the sentiment in this tacked-on ending does not express what the novel's action has been developing. Even in terms of character this conclusion is something of a surprise, for there are no untimely or tragic deaths. And again, as the novel ends and we see Oakes fade away Cooper tells us that

He had lived his time, and supplied an instance of the insufficiency of worldly success to complete the destiny of man; having, in a degree, survived his faculties, and the consciousness of all he had done, and all he merited. As a small offset to this failing of nature, he had regained a glimmering view of one of the most striking scenes, and of much the most enduring sentiment, of a long life, which God, in mercy, permitted to be terminated in the act of humble submission to his own greatness and glory.
(pp. 503-04)

This is a fine statement of theme, and a very fine theme indeed. In this quiet, Miltonic ending, we are moved to reflection and wonder at both the mystery and vagaries of life. But then we reflect on The Two Admirals and begin to feel uneasy about this conclusion, for except for this final scene what in the novel, in character or action, has brought us here? It is as if Cooper has made an inductive leap to an insight the novel perhaps should have built to. It is also as if Cooper expected us to question the relevancy and significance of the

Westminster scene, and so he provides us with reason and justification for it.-

What we should note in The Two Admirals is Cooper's perception at the story's end of the themes he was to pursue in his subsequent sea novels. Life as problematical, symbolized often by empty military victories, characters with indefinite yearnings and anguish confront us with people and problems modern in their appearance, if not in their treatment.

Had Cooper written only the five sea novels thus far examined, he would be unknown today. I have attempted to show that all of them have purple patches, but none is without many serious flaws. A modern reader will have difficulty becoming involved in these romantic tales, especially the first three, even though The Red Rover is probably the most readable of all five. For as little improvement and progress as Cooper made with these five tales of nautical setting, it is a credit to his perseverance and determination that he did not abandon the genre altogether. Cooper began this experiment in The Pilot to demonstrate his expertise at rendering accurately drawn pictures of ships and sailors. His fifth attempt, The Two Admirals, demonstrates his nautical expertise better than any of the others and was written in part to prod the American government into heeding the necessity

of a strong navy organized into fleets. And while we do see Cooper expanding his range to a social tract with Homeward Bound, essentially a prelude to his novel of manners Home as Found, and to a detailed study of an English political crisis and an individual crisis of values and ideals with The Two Admirals, still these five novels indicate how the nautical genre had thus far remained largely a romantic device and an excuse for escapist fare. And in all five there is some fatal split between form and idea.

My brief analyses of these early tales have been undertaken primarily to provide a backdrop against which Cooper's greater accomplishments in the nautical genre can be closely examined. Wing-and-Wing, Afloat and Ashore, and The Sea Lions represent Cooper's supreme achievement in and contribution to sea fiction. Jack Tier and Ned Myers belong in a separate category though these novels are worthy of close study as they help to chronicle the development of their author's fictional technique and those themes he found suitable for expression through the maritime setting.

End-notes

- 8 Letters and Journals, IV, 460.
- 9 James Fenimore Cooper, The Pilot: A Tale of the Sea (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, n.d.) p. vii. All references are to this edition.
- 10 Kay Seymore House, Cooper's Americans (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1965), p. 185.
- 11 Thomas Philbrick, James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1961), p. 83.
- 12 James Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949), p. 38.
- 13 House, p. 187.
- 14 George Dekker, James Fenimore Cooper: The American Scott (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1967), p. 114.
- 15 Donald Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1962), p. 40.
- 16 Cooper's prefaces, while not as complex or expansive as are Henry James's, for example, do suggest those ideas which often sparked the work's creation. But one must be careful to remember that the prefaces are always of much later composition than the novels.
- 17 Letters and Journals, I, 167.

18 George Dekker makes the point that Cooper perhaps intended to deal with slavery in the novel more than the finished story actually does, for two of Wilder's underlings are Dick Fid, a Long Tom Coffin type, and Guinea, a subservient black. Much of the novel's dialogue, though little of its action, treats racial relations and Guinea's intelligence, abilities, and honesty as a black. A much more fully developed black companion is Neb in Afloat and Ashore who is an important minor character. Miss Grayson's observation about the ship relates one of Cooper's serious purposes in the novel: "'A slaver! How deceitful is all her beauty and symmetry! I will never trust to appearances again, since so lovely a vessel can be devoted to so vile a purpose'" (p. 198).

19 Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 132.

20 James Fenimore Cooper, The Red Rover (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, n.d.), p. 522. All references are to this edition.

21 Grossman, p. 59.

22 House, p. 193.

23 Philbrick, p. 67.

24 Dekker, p. 115.

25 Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 49.

26 Grossman, p. 18.

27 Philbrick, p. 57.

28 Philbrick, p. 58.

29 Letters and Journals, I, 258.

30

Letters and Journals, I, 300.

31

James Fenimore Cooper, The Water-Witch (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, n.d.), p. 85. All references are to this edition.

32

See George Dekker and John P. McWilliams, Fenimore Cooper: The Critical Heritage (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 166.

33

Winters, Maule's Curse, p. 25.

34

Dekker, p. 26.

35

Dekker, pp. 125-26.

36

Grossman, p. 71.

37

Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 50.

38

See Letters and Journals, I, 421.

39

Francis Parkman, "The Works of James Fenimore Cooper," North American Review, lxxiv (Jan. 1852), 147-61, quoted in Dekker and McWilliams, pp. 258-59.

40

James Fenimore Cooper, Homeward Bound (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, n.d.), p. iii. All references are to this edition.

41

W. C. Brownell cites him as an example of Cooper's occasional "grotesque" failure at caricature, in "Cooper," in American Prose Masters (New York: Scribner's, 1923), p. 25.

42

Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 80.

43 Robert Spiller, Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times (New York: Minton, Balch, & Co., 1931), p. 259.

44 Grossman, p. 119.

45 Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 91.

46 James Fenimore Cooper, The Two Admirals (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, n.d.), p. 444. All references are to this edition.

47 Philbrick, p. 127.

48 Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 92.

III. Wing-and-Wing: A New Direction for the Nautical Tale

--To Richard Henry Dana: "That your literature should not pay, was natural enough. The public never buys literary instruction, unless in the shape of school books. The bible would be a dead failure, with all its wisdom and poetry, but for religious feeling."⁴⁹

What better advertisement for Cooper's next sea novel than his own in a letter to his publishers, Lea and Blanchard: "The book will be called 'Le Feu-Follet, or The Wing and Wing.' It is a sea story. Time 1700--scene Mediter /r/ anean--actors principally English, French and Italians--though there is one American sailor. The hero Raoul Yvard is a Frenchman--The heroine, Ghita Carraccioli, an Italian. There is fighting and other marvels of the deep. I think it will be an interesting story."⁵⁰ Various critical judgments notwithstanding, Wing-and-Wing⁵¹ is the first of Cooper's realistic sea novels. This is the first nautical tale in which the hero suffers due to his ideas, his delusions, and especially due to his excessive pride, and in this way the story represents a significant departure from the early novels that it has a resemblance to, especially The Red Rover and The Water-Witch, and is clearly a precursor to Afloat and Ashore and The Sea Lions.

Thomas Philbrick expresses the majority opinion in his judgment that Wing-and-Wing represents a "reversal

of the trend toward a less romantic treatment of maritime life," and that it seems "to embody a deliberate resolve to retreat from the oppressive reality of here and now."⁵² This must, in part, be granted. The types of characters, the setting, and aspects of the action are generally romantic. An enchanting French pirate lugger captained by a dashing Red Rover and Skimmer of the Seas type, Raoul Yvard, who is a kind of free-lance French pirate engaged in hide-and-seek with the English navy--this beginning sounds familiar to a reader of Cooper's early tales. There is a central love plot involving Raoul and Ghita, but these two neither marry, nor do they live long and contented lives. Indeed, their love remains unconsummated in any physical or emotional sense. They are kept apart and thus the novel's movement is sustained because Ghita will not accept the French pirate, a child of the Revolution, until he forsakes his atheistic attitudes. Ghita is moral, pious, devout, and humble to a fault. Although she does care much for Raoul, she sets his conversion to God as a prerequisite for any substantial development of their relationship. The anguished separation of Raoul and Ghita is distinctly unromantic in that it is never resolved, and such is Cooper's technique throughout the novel: within the standard escapist, romantic, and sentimental

fare are elements and details that strike us as out of the ordinary, not typically Cooper's automatic, repetitious writing.

In the novel's opening scene Raoul Yvard brings his felucca, the Feu-Follet (the Jack-o-Lantern), to the island of Elba in search of Ghita. This attempt puts the French privateer in some measure of danger, as the English patrol these waters and are, in fact, eager to capture the infamous and illusive Raoul. (These traits are ones he shares with former sailors on Cooper's ships.) Various subsequent plot developments involve similar attempts by Raoul to be with Ghita, who continually warns him of the ridiculous risks he is taking by pursuing her all over the Mediterranean area. Ghita is most upset by Raoul's behavior because he is overly confident and proud, and Ghita fervidly believes disaster surely must ultimately await the godless.

The character of Raoul's ship makes it in Philbrick's opinion a throwback to the ships of the early naval tales in that it draws our attention away from the characters, thus making them appear even more wooden and unreal than they otherwise would. Raoul's ship is enchanting and somewhat magical, but Raoul has our attention far more than, for example, the Skimmer does in Water-Witch. As Philbrick himself notes, our attention is particularly directed toward the second in command of the Feu-Follet, who is the

one American Cooper mentioned in his description of the novel: Ithuel Bolt is a ruthless, greedy, Yankee free-lance grubber.

Ithuel is as much a caricature as Long Tom Coffin even though his values are the antitheses of the harpooner's, but Ithuel has no antecedents in the early sea tales. One could quibble with W. C. Brownell's judgment that Bolt "is certainly one of the notable characters of fiction,"⁵³ yet he is eminently more believable than Coffin, Captain Truck, or the other American exaggerations. Nowhere in the earlier sea novels do we encounter a character as unashamedly corrupt as Bolt whose selfish instincts for survival cause him no uneasiness. While Ithuel is still removed from the frightening realism of Captain Spike in Jack Tier, he is even more removed from the vaporish marionettes of the earlier nautical tales.

Another mistake readers of this novel have made involves the central love plot. A cursory reading suggests the obvious and strained conflict between French Deism (Raoul) and Italian Catholicism (Ghita) as the novel's focus. Though so commonly accepted as to be taken for granted by many readers, this statement of the novel's subject gives Cooper too little credit. The real and more universal conflict is between pride (Raoul) and humility (Ghita). Raoul's ultimate destruction, which is also a

departure from the method of the early novels, is explicitly a punishment for his too confident sense of self, his egoism. Most of Ghita's dialogue is devoted to religious dogma, and she is overly angelic, but her major function in the novel is to represent an unquestioning humility and submission to divine authority. That it is a Roman Catholic authority in this instance is not important. Similarly, Bolt claims a Puritan background, and in a closing sum-up Cooper tells us that Bolt, who is one of the few to survive the novel's final battle between Raoul and his crew and the British, will eventually become successful and will after he returns to America become a hypocritical pontificating Deacon. Bolt, however, is not simply a joke on the Puritans. While Cooper is certainly taking to task the ruthless and selfish Yankee type that Bolt represents, the significance of his religion lies not in its specific dogma but in how Bolt personally acquired and how he maintains his religious beliefs. On a religious scale, Ghita and Raoul represent extremes, Bolt a middle position. Bolt does not in any real or sincere way believe or follow the creeds of any church. What he pretends to uphold has simply been inculcated in him without his having undergone a spiritual "experience" or any serious questioning. Bolt has no deep emotions about anything other than himself and his immediate economic prospects.

It is necessary to understand the actual relationship between the three major characters in order to avoid the erroneous conclusion of George Dekker that Raoul and Ghita are involved in one issue, Bolt in some other. Ghita's relationship to God is the only proper one from Cooper's perspective, but this in no way involves her Catholicism. Raoul in his frank and even condescending anti-clerical attitude is no more unacceptable than Bolt with his superficial credo. Dekker is certainly correct in his intimation that Bolt is a far more interesting character than Raoul or Ghita, but we cannot split the novel into their problems and his.⁵⁴ The moral issue of the novel embraces the issue between reason and faith; beyond that it is non-sectarian.

To point out this consistency and unity of the major characters is clearly not to say that Wing-and-Wing is completely successful. There also remain various romantic elements that mostly flaw the novel, and these center on Raoul and Ghita. Raoul, like the earlier sea heroes, and despite his godlessness, is first seen as a "figure of activity" with a profile "beautifully classical" and with a face that is more than beautiful.⁵⁵ He speaks romantically of his ship as the Rover and the Skimmer did before him about theirs, as "'here, there, and everywhere, before her enemies suspect her'" (p. 36).

With the Feu-Follet lying at anchor in the Bay of Porto Ferrajo, the Proserpine, a much larger English vessel, and one on which Bolt had been impressed for two years, is sighted nearing the cul-de-sac bay. Raoul chooses to continue his disguise--as an Englishman named Sir Smees--that he has played upon the Italian officials of Porto Ferrajo, and to attempt to deceive the English rather than fleeing at once. He convinces the Elbans that the approaching ship is French so that his own escape, when he finally makes it, is thought by them to be a daring attempt to lead the new vessel away from their island. This ploy works, but later Raoul returns to the island, thus taking another great and unnecessary risk. His behavior demonstrates not only his overweening pride and confidence in his own abilities, but also his enjoyment of the Elbans' naive admiration for him. Raoul Yvard, we are told, loves to act, but Cooper creates him as one who loves and lives to overact.

The very night Raoul returns to Elba after leading the Proserpine on a merry chase he is almost caught by the British. He is saved by Bolt; that is, he is saved by Bolt's total distrust of everything, his hatred of the English, and his constant attention to threats to his person. Bolt has a maniacal hatred of the English. So on this occasion, the French privateers neatly escape, making both the Italians and English look still more inept and bumbling. Yet even in this interesting and lively escape-and-

chase episode, we note details not found in the earlier romances. For one, the Italians, though humorous caricatures, are honest, good people. Thus Raoul's self-satisfying deceptions do not cause him to appear heroic to us. Similarly, the English officers that we first see are forthright and likeable. The conflict, therefore, is not clear-cut and is more complex and difficult to sort out than in the early tales. Only the issue between the two admirals, in The Two Admirals, is as initially complex. Furthermore, the characteristics of Raoul that do not evoke respect are not simply grinned aside or explained away by the enemies' seeming to deserve whatever treatment they receive. Indeed, it is difficult to determine which side represents the hero and which side the villain.

One exception to this complicating condition is Raoul's chivalry during battle. He will not slaughter helpless enemies, for example, despite Bolt's urging of such action whenever an appropriate situation exists. In fact, Raoul's death is partially due to his unwillingness to follow Bolt's advice and use a group of wounded English sailors as a shield against a much superior force of British ships and sailors. And when Raoul is finally captured by the British, he refuses to confess anything until he feels he must to avoid Ghita's being questioned by Captain Cuffe and his associates: ". . . so profound was his reverence for Ghita's singleness of heart and mind, that he would not,

by look or gesture, in any manner endeavor to undermine that sacred love of truth which he knew formed the very foundations of her character" (pp. 279-80). (Ghita's sensibility seems too precious, too fragile to be believed.) Actually, Raoul's relationship with his British captors is idealized throughout. Cuffe at one point attempts to bribe Raoul, offering him his freedom if he will betray the Feu-Follet. To Raoul this suggestion is infamy and treachery, though he does protest smugly but with "quiet simplicity and steadiness" (p. 334). In fact, he sternly scolds Cuffe, who quickly apologizes. Suddenly these adversaries see how little they actually know each other's motives and purposes, and in an unlikely denouement, "Cuffe seized Raoul's hand, and even a tear escaped him as he squeezed it warmly" (p. 335).

Such chivalrous behavior, with men true to their word even to their sworn, deadly enemy, and even if it means their own lives, always reminds a reader of Cooper of Natty Bumppo. His absolute devotion to truth, honesty, and honor even when dealing with uncivilized Indian captives and captors is the high point of Cooper's romance. Yet whether such actions appear in the Leatherstocking or sea novels, one must embrace Cooper's sincere attempt to represent traits of man infinitely desirable, albeit infrequently encountered.

In Wing-and-Wing Ghita is romantically unreal in her absolute devotion, piety, and humility. She cannot lie, feign ignorance, or behave in any un-Christian manner, not even if Raoul's or her own life is in jeopardy. Ghita is linked to some of the romantic characters of the early novels in having a secretive, foundling history. The truth of her ancestry is revealed when her grandfather, Don Francesco, is suddenly executed on board one of the English ships. Ghita visits her condemned grandfather shortly before his death and bolsters his wavering faith, telling him not to "'mistake the shadow for the substance'" (p. 219). Since the gates of heaven are open to him, what should he care for worldly concerns? Ghita is an obvious saint--and Mary--figure as she accompanies her disgraced grandfather to the scaffold, thus exposing herself to public shame and ridicule. This scene is overdrawn, as Cooper's death scenes so often are, with Ghita as an explicit mouth-piece for Cooper's own religious beliefs when she says of her grandfather that he "'is wiser, as he is safer, who puts more reliance on the goodness of God than on his own merits'" (p. 230). She is ethereal and otherworldly in her faith, which, while not invalidating her creed, suggests a being more angelic than mortal. When asked by the English about Raoul, her heart at first beats violently: "Then followed the triumph of innocence; the purity of her mind

and the quiet of her conscience reassuring her . . ."
 (p. 282). But Raoul interposes to stop this "cruel scene." This is one of the more melodramatic and sentimental scenes in the novel, in which Cooper does not restrain himself from giving up the characters to unlikely absolutes. When Raoul confesses, he demonstrates a "manliness and quiet dignity" (p. 295), and, upon receiving the sentence of death by hanging, he simply bows with "dignity and courtesy to the court" (p. 297).

Although the whole of the trial scene throws sympathy to Raoul, the English officers are uneasy with the verdict, just as they were earlier with Don Francesco's execution. The British sailors would prefer for Raoul to die valiantly in battle, not pinioned and helpless. Similarly they are opposed to attempts at convincing Raoul to forsake his crew and ship to save his own life. So, like both Raoul and Ghita, in their own ways the common sailors are living at a level well above that of common men. These aspects of the characters and the action give credence to the claims of some readers that Wing-and-Wing is romantic and unrealistic for the most part.

Yet in counterpoint to such romantic effects is Cuffe, for example, as he worries over what to do with Ithuel Bolt, who also has been captured. Bolt claims to be an American and thus should be released. If he is in fact

English, as his captors like to think, then he is a deserter and should be executed. However, they all are aware that Bolt is a very able seaman and that her majesty's vessels can always use a few more hands. The pragmatic compromise, nicely rationalized by Cuffe, is simply once again to impress Bolt. Some of the officers are aware of their lack of absolute principles in dealing with this prisoner, and, in fact, most of them "know" he is an American, as he claims, though none of them will admit it. "Cuffe consequently could not make up his mind to do full justice to Ithuel, while he could not make up his mind to push justice so far as trial and punishment" (p. 310). Cooper does tell us that Admiral Nelson, had he known all the facts, would have ordered Bolt's release, for Nelson is a man of high and firm principles. Captain Cuffe, on the other hand, is a man of amoral practicality and expedience in his handling of Bolt. Although this episode in the novel does not resonate with allegorical or symbolic implications, one is still struck by a similarity with Melville's Billy Budd. And Cuffe's dilemma and solution--the immorality of his act can somehow either be blindly denied or explained--are surprisingly modern. It is to Cooper's credit that amid certain romantic and idealistic aspects, Wing-and-Wing presents men without moral principles, ranging from Bolt's villainesque, monolithic selfishness to Cuffe's rationalizing away moral imperatives.

It is, however, only a short time after this interesting and engrossing scene that Cooper's inconsistency and carelessness and also perhaps his constant impulse to idealize cause him to ruin the fine effect of Cuffe's ethical maneuverings. When the English are unable to find out through Bolt the location of the Feu-Follet, one of Cuffe's officers suggests interrogating Ghita. Here is Cuffe's rejection of this proposal: "' . . . to probe the affections of a poor, innocent girl, in this way, would be going too far. The heart of a young girl should be sacred, under every circumstance'" (p. 342). This statement would be difficult to accept from any character, perhaps other than Natty Bumppo. From the British captain of the previous scene it is impossibly out of character.

Once the English have agreed to execute Raoul, the narrative immediately begins to lose focus because, ironically, Cooper wishes to draw out the time of the execution so as to create suspense. Consequently, various minor characters are suddenly introduced, Mr. Clinch and Mr. Strand for example, who rather than adding some suspense, dissipate it by shifting attention from Raoul and his plight. Indeed, for too many pages we do not even see Raoul. The tension therefore that Cooper wants to create is transformed into boredom. When the appointed time comes and the noose is put around the privateer's neck, Cooper once again drags out a supposedly last-second

surprising reprieve. Such a conclusion is oddly anti-climactic, being so predictable and so common in Cooper's novels. Such lazy and automatic writing seriously lessens the novel's total effect, for such incidents occur at moments of supposed tension and climax. Cooper also too often describes suspense rather than creating it dramatically through action and dialogue.

During the evening of the day he is tried, convicted, and nearly executed, Raoul and Bolt escape from the Proserpine, smuggled out on a boat carrying Ghita and her uncle. Raoul continues in his brazen and foolhardy ways, for it is on such dangerous excitement that he thrives. So despite urgings from many others, especially Ghita, Raoul continues to tempt fate. Overly satisfied with his ship's ability, with his own, and with the success of his tricks and disguises, he spurns the chance to escape the English. Back on board the Feu-Follet, "Raoul trod the deck of his lugger again, with the pride of a monarch as he ascends his throne. . . . He was indifferent to the circumstance that he was environed by powerful enemies" (p. 394). What makes Raoul's god-like posture significant is what causes his ultimate downfall: his romantic, Tom Sawyer-like schemes that seem born out of a brain beclouded by his pride and excessive self-confidence. Such a situation, especially one involving the protagonist, is new in Cooper's sea fiction. Certainly Raoul's enemies, the

English and the Italians, and uncooperative nature at crucial times, are the immediate causes of his downfall; but the ultimate, overwhelming circumstance is his shortsighted, prideful acts. When the Feu-Follet goes aground in a calm, such a mistake "was to be classed among the unpardonable sins. Still, it was by no means a rare occurrence. Ships, like men, are often cast away by an excess of confidence" (p. 408). That is, the very attitudes and behavior that constitute the swash-buckling Rover, Skimmer, and others, are here punished. But Raoul does not strike us as inventive, daring, or brave, only very mistaken. Ghita especially brings on this judgement. The realistic themes suggested in this backhanded way by showing the limits and pitfalls of Raoul's romance of self are what other readers of Wing-and-Wing have not discussed. Such matters are more obvious in the novels to come, but they are clearly here in a nascent state.

This conflict between realism and romanticism reverses itself in what for Cooper was the most substantial thematic content of Wing-and-Wing. Raoul's irreligion is, paradoxically, based primarily, he thinks, on his devotion to reality, on his unwillingness to believe anything not available to the senses and verifiable by them. And it is Ghita in her romantically religious flights that Cooper holds up as model. In the novel's preface Cooper bemoans one effect of the French revolution, the revolution of

which Raoul is a representative product: " . . . the letting loose of the audacious from all the venerable and healthful restraints of the church, to set them afloat on the sea of speculation and conceit. (Cooper's metaphor becomes literal in the person of Raoul.) There is something so gratifying to human vanity in fancying ourselves superior to most around us, that we believe few young men attain their majority without imbibing more or less of the taint of unbelief, and passing through the mists of a vapid moral atmosphere, before they come to the clear, manly, and yet humble perceptions that teach most of us, in the end, our own insignificance, the great benevolence as well as wisdom of the scheme of redemption, and the philosophy of the christian religion as well as its divinity" (p. iii). This last is a clear and concise expression of Cooper's grand theme in his late sea novels beginning with Wing-and-Wing.

The religious theme of the novel, which is a projection or extension of that conflict already discussed, is emphasized as soon as Raoul and Ghita first encounter each other, for she says, in the midst of Raoul's attempts at mystifying the bumpkinish Italian officials: "'The state of your country makes your want of religion a matter of regret, rather than of accusation, but it is none the less a dreadful evil'" (p. 37). Raoul also exhibits a sinful smugness

when he tells Ghita that he went to Rome to ascertain if the French opinion of the Pope was correct, "'before I set up in religion for myself'" (87). He reports that he found the Pope only a man, not infallible, surrounded by roguish cardinals. This attitude is no more blasphemous to Ghita than Raoul's declaration of love to her when he says, "'in thee I worship purity, and holiness, and--'" (p. 87). Such feelings are not those of the typical lovestruck hero of the romantic novels. Raoul exists outside the group of approved characters. He takes on a polemical and pontifical tone when Ghita asks him if he feels thankful to God for his escape from the English:

"'Peste! Our French deity is little thought of just now, Ghita. Republics, as you know, have no great faith in religion-- is it not so, mon brave American? Tell us, Etooell; have you any religion in America?'"

As Ithuel had often heard Raoul's opinions on this subject, and knew the prevailing state of France in this particular, he neither felt nor expressed any surprise at the question. Still, the idea ran counter to all his own notions and prejudices, he having been early taught to respect religion, even when he was most serving the devil. . . . "In Ameriky, we even put religion before dollars; and if that isn't convincing, I'll give it up." (pp. 150-51)

Bolt's insincerity and too pragmatic application of religion is somewhat obvious. Ghita reiterates a point made earlier when she discounts any real significance to the existence of various religious sects. She, like Cooper,

perceives that the underlying belief in God, the humble and sacrificing life pursued by a real believer is what is important. Ghita asks Bolt: "'In what can our religion differ . . . if we are both Christians? Americans or Italians, it is all the same'" (p. 151). Ghita is taken aback by Bolt's idea that the icons of the Catholic church are themselves worshipped, rather than what they stand for. The American says he wants only "'a pure, naked religion, that will stand to reason'" (p. 153). To this Raoul agrees: "'Reason before all things Ghita; and most of all reason in religion'" (p. 153). The sole preserver of true religious feeling responds with the solid argument that God would not be God if he were "reasonable," nor if man could "understand" Him.

This scene involving all three of the major characters represents the crux of the religious content of Wing-and-Wing. Raoul's statements in this encounter establish his abhorrence of religious mysteries and faith. He continues to trust exclusively in his own abilities, his reason, his self as inviolate. It would be a mistake not to recognize that Raoul is not another Rover, a finally well-meaning and noble revolutionary; nor is he another Skimmer of the Seas, a gallant and loveable smuggler. Raoul's ignominious destruction in his prime marks this as a late sea novel. The attitude and beliefs that Ghita espouses in this scene can be regarded as the religious theme of all

of the late sea fiction, and of much of Cooper's other fiction too. Raoul's rejection of the supremacy of the Christian standards of faith, piety, and especially humility links him to Miles Wallingford and Roswell Gardiner who are confronted by similar knowledge and suffer, though they go through this with better results, until they give themselves up to God's message to man. These epiphanic episodes result in a changed life--to those who undergo a revelation come worldly rewards, happiness, life. These late works are explicitly moralistic in the way Christians are rewarded and sinners punished, with the family of man splitting neatly into the lost and the saved. The obviousness and explicitness of this division flaws Wing-and-Wing. It is not allegorical, just heavy-handed.

The natural question about this pivotal episode involving the three principals is this: What has it all to do with ships, sailors, and the sea? Why did Cooper choose the nautical milieu for the tale? Does it have a significance, a function?

The maritime elements of this novel are merely gratuitous as regards the religious theme. Raoul is only once asked to look at the splendor and expanse of nature or the limitless ocean and to be awed at the mystery of creation. Cooper's nautical characters, therefore, still have little reason for being afloat other than this being their life style. Beyond the obvious plot necessities, the marine genre here has no raison de etre.

Cooper apparently wanted characters of the French revolution; yet not desiring to set his novel in France, he saw that a way to involve characters like Raoul was to set the novel at sea where various faiths and nationalities could be conveniently juxtaposed. But beyond this technical function, the sea, ships, and sailing men are superfluous. There is no discernible significance to Raoul's or Bolt's being seamen, one a captain, the other a mate. In this important aspect, therefore, Cooper's use of the nautical novel genre is as restricted and artificial as in the early tales. He is not using the resources of nature abundantly available in such a setting. Had Cooper made such cosmetic use of the forests and prairies in the Leatherstocking series, those novels would not be today the important books they are. Whether symbols of American newness and innocence or news of God, the books depicting Natty's surroundings depend for their success on setting, most of the characters being tintype and uninteresting. For this reason, primarily, the early sea novels fall short of the excellence of The Deerslayer and the others.

One simple way to illustrate the split between the ponderous religious issues and the action and setting of Wing-and-Wing is to note how ineptly these religious interludes are worked into the narrative. They strike us as merely digressions. For example, during a chase and pursuit sequence, Raoul and Ghita stop to gaze up

romantically at the stars. Raoul, in his practical, realist way explains the stars' navigational importance to sailors. Ghita, on the other hand, hopes that he realizes "'Those stars may have a higher office,'" for how can we look at them "'without believing in a God, and feeling the insignificance of our being?'" Raoul insists that some principle governs the universe, a power, but he rejects that any Being does. Raoul says "'it is the reason of things, rather than a deity'" (p. 173). He insists on objective proof before he will accept Ghita's belief that a Being rules the cosmos. So again we have the loggerhead of faith versus evidential reasoning. Then suddenly some episode involving the British simply interrupts Raoul and Ghita and the substance of their theological discussion is more or less postponed until another pause in the action. This dichotomy between theme and structure, and theme and narrative action, has been noted in the other novels, especially in Homeward Bound. Such an absence of unity creates a seriously flawed story, as all critics of Cooper have noted. This is probably the most common criticism of his novels, especially of his early nautical tales.

However, Cooper does make a meager attempt to give Raoul's godlessness another dimension by having Captain Cuffe say, when he mistakenly thinks Raoul has been

killed, that "' it [Loss of human life] has been made in the service of good government and religion'" (p. 185). Cuffe outrageously suggests that Raoul's lugger is filled with loose women singing irreligious songs and thus deserves annihilation. Similarly Admiral Nelson speaks of the "glorious and sacred cause" of the English in battling the French rebels who have beheaded their king and denounced their God (p. 200). Yet neither Cuffe nor Nelson, nor any of the English appear to be working for the Lord in any holy cause. Ghita is the only true model of religion in both thought and act, and she does not want to combat or destroy evil, simply, instead, to transform it. Thus Raoul does not affect us as the unbelieving Everyman. He has no symbolic value in this regard.

A development that focuses on Raoul's fiercely independent, unbelieving stance involves the issue that his relationship with Ghita gradually comes to focus on: will he ever see the light and give up all to God? As each episode with the English occurs, Ghita consistently questions Raoul as if to ask whether he is now ready for conversion. When Raoul's execution is forestalled, Cooper tells us that "The escape from death, like his capture, and the other incidents of his cruise, was viewed simply as the result of the fortune of war" (p. 363). Although Raoul is not yet ready for conversion, Cooper would have us keep thinking that it is not too late. Ghita asks

Raoul at various times if he is not yet thankful to God: "'God has relieved you from this great jeopardy, and your duty is to strive to act as it is evident He intends you to do'" (p. 379). But Raoul recklessly attacks priests as "'scourges sent to torment men in every shape! They inflict hard lessons in childhood, teach asperity in youth, and make us superstitious and silly in age'" (p. 388). It is no surprise that Cooper highlights the challenge to established society and belief that such a harangue represents. When Raoul later regains the command of his felucca and strides across the deck as a monarch, we see pride before the fall.

The final battle scene of the novel soon follows. The French, who have become stranded in a cove and are thus unable to take advantage of the grace and speed of their craft, fare well initially, but subsequent assaults by the English quickly bring the conflict to a resounding French defeat. Ithuel Bolt with his supreme instinct for self-preservation escapes. Although Raoul receives a fatal wound, he dies a Cooperian death--slow, lucid, and heart-rendering. He is astonished at how unexpectedly and ironically he has come to his end. His earlier pride and self-confidence have almost disappeared, and we suspect his conversion is at hand.

"It is remarkable, Ghita . . . that I, Raoul Yvard--the corsair--the man of wars and tempests, fierce combats and hair-breadth escapes should be dying here, on this rock, with all those stars looking down upon me, as it might be, from heaven, seeming to smile upon me! . . . Dost thou think one like me would be received into His presence, Ghita? '"

"Do not doubt it; free from all error and weakness Himself, His Holy Spirit delights in the penitent and the sorrowful. O! dearest, dearest Raoul, if thou would'st but pray!" (p. 459).

But Ghita's hopeful expectations that Raoul is about to experience conversion are disappointed when he begins to think of his ship's escape; so she makes a final plea:

"O! Raoul! there is no fate but the holy will of God. Deceive not thyself at this awful moment; bow down thy proud spirit in humility, and turn to Him for succor!"

"Poor Ghita! Well, thine is not the only innocent mind by millions that hath been trammelled by priests; and I suppose, what hath commenced with the beginning will last till the end." (p. 459).

Cooper uncharacteristically leaves the matter of Raoul's conversion ambiguous, and it is to Cooper's credit that he resists the automatic, pat conversion which readers of his earlier sea romances would expect. This death scene is melodramatic and sentimental, to be sure, but Raoul's imperfect conversion rings true.

Another uncharacteristic detail of this last scene between Ghita and Raoul is the cruel irony of Ghita's

believing Raoul is at any moment about to see God, only for him to die suddenly, leaving the matter undecided.

"That star haunts me, Ghita!" Raoul at length muttered. "If it be really a world, some all-powerful hand must have created it. Chance never made a world, more than chance made a ship. Thought, mind, intelligence must have governed at the formation of one as well as of the other."

For months Ghita had not known an instant as happy as that. It appeared as if the mind of Raoul were about to extricate itself from the shallow philosophy so much in fashion. . . .

"Raoul," she whispered, "God is there, as He is with us, on this rock. His spirit is everywhere. Bless Him! bless Him in thy soul, my beloved, and be forever happy!"

Raoul answered not. . . . Raoul Yvard was dead. (p. 462).

This does not leave the plot unresolved, but the theme, the meaning of Raoul's life and death, is nicely complicated.

Ghita immediately, but only momentarily, feels despair. She prays and keeps a vigil over the body for a night, which brings this ultimate episode of the novel to a close. "The heavy sirocco that soon succeeded drove the waves athwart the islet of the ruins, effectually erasing its stains of blood, and sweeping every trace of the Feu-Follet, and of the recent events, into the sea" (p. 464). This quiet ending also subtly suggests the impermanence, finality, and transience of man and the things of man.

Cooper concludes Wing-and-Wing in one of his favorite ways, by summing up the subsequent lives of the major characters. We are told that Ithuel Bolt will many years later return to America with a lot of money and marry a widow. "In due time he 'experienced religion,' and at this moment is an active abolitionist, a patron of the temperance cause, teetotally, and a general terror to evil-doers, under the appellation of Deacon Bolt."

"It was very different with the meek, pious, and singleminded Ghita; though one was e'en a Roman Catholic, and the other a Protestant, and that, too, of the Puritan school" (p. 469). Ghita retires to a convent so she can pass uninterrupted hours "in repeating prayers for the soul of Raoul" (p. 470), this man who for a time had threatened "to disturb the just ascendancy of the dread Being who had created her" (p. 469).

The rationale that brings us to this conclusion, especially to Raoul's destruction, is conveyed by the narrative voice of the novel: "It would seem, indeed, that a principle pervades nature, which renders it impossible for man to escape the consequences of his own evil deeds, even in this life; as if God had decreed the universal predominance of truth, and the never-failing downfall of falsehood from the beginning; the success of wrong being ever temporary, while the triumph of the right is eternal" (p. 38). Later Cooper again refers to that

"mysterious principle of right which is implanted in the principle of things" (p. 70). He who does evil or injustice will, if not immediately punished, eventually be demoralized.

This precept, which is fairly explicit in most of Cooper's work, explains Raoul's early triumphs, especially the ones gained through deception and disguise, and it also accounts for his eventual death and defeat. Cooper would have us take this idealized principle and say with it that Raoul Yvard is punished by Cooper the God-creator, just as those real life transgressors will be punished by God. This supremely optimistic moralistic belief is a foundation for all of Cooper's moral and religious principles. It explains why his works are divided neatly among melodramatic good and evil people. No matter how difficult any individual's choice in life, the truth, the religious and therefore ultimate truth, is always discernible. Man's errors and sins come as a result of his refusal to perceive this truth. Cooper's world demonstrates that appearances are not always to be trusted, that there are fogs and mists which impair visibility in society, among men, just as surely as there are at sea. But his characters who suffer, who suffer punishment specifically, have not been deceived but, instead, have deceived themselves. The truth, God's beacon in a dark world, is always there. Raoul's end is due solely to

himself: in the face of good advice to the contrary he behaves badly. The willing culpability of Cooper's protagonists in the later sea tales has not been sufficiently stressed by readers of Cooper's work who emphasize the unpredictability of life at sea. There is nothing capricious in Raoul's undoing. Indeed not, for from any orthodox position, his demise is cause for marvelling at the wonder of God's world wherein evil is punished. The difference is important, for we feel one way if a man suffers the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," and quite another if he is merely self-deluded through pride.

Thus Donald Ringe's argument for a "morally complex world" in Wing-and-Wing because Ghita's and Raoul's choices are "never easy" is unsound. True, Ghita agonizes over Raoul's state of sin, but she is never close to forsaking her faith, and to think so would require a disregard of special ardor. Ringe also seems to see Raoul's death juxtaposed with Bolt's success as evidence of moral complexity. What complicates here, however, is Cooper's including both of them. Raoul's destruction is an explicit moral judgment against him. He deserves what he receives, as Ghita herself is quick to realize. In this absolute system Bolt's escape and longevity do appear odd, yet Bolt is simply a bloodless man who neither loves nor hates anything enough to give his life for its preservation or destruction. Ghita would readily give up all for God;

Raoul would do the same for France. The implication, therefore, is that Bolt's life is ultimately worthless and inconsequential. There is no "dark view of the world"⁵⁶ in this, for it is not Cooper who ignores reality to the death, but Raoul Yvard. In an earlier Cooper novel he would have succeeded in eluding the English and lived to old age, and somewhere along the line he would have experienced a sincere and total conversion to Christ. But in Wing-and-Wing the protagonist does not survive beyond the foolish-and-headstrong-young-man stage. As Ringe observes, Raoul's end is "more consistent with the logic of his life, is much more realistic"⁵⁷ than we have seen in the characters of the early sea novels.

Most readers of Wing-and-Wing note the similarity between it and The Water-Witch, and most agree that the former is more successful. Although minor characters in each tend to grab our attention (the Alderman and Bolt), and although both are among Cooper's most memorable creations, the major characters of Wing-and-Wing are relatively more interesting and believable. The unsuccessful magic and illusion devices that cause The Water-Witch to read like a poor novelistic version of A Mid-Summer Night's Dream are not present in the later book. Setting Raoul's adventure in the Mediterranean and the Bay of Naples is simultaneously more romantic and realistic than

the New York Harbor, which James Grossman calls The Water-Witch's "mock-Mediterranean setting."⁵⁸

We come at last to the meaning and significance of Wing-and-Wing as a sea novel. As discussed earlier, the nautical characters, setting, and paraphernalia serve no crucial purpose and seem as arbitrary as these matters do in The Water-Witch or The Pilot. There exists only a moderate amount of nautical jargon and, fortunately, no web-footed Long Tom Coffin types. Yet the novel does contain, particularly in its first one hundred pages, the most interesting naval chase scenes Cooper had yet written. The final battle is also realistically and entertainingly done. None of these strengths, however, make the naval action less arbitrary, but writing several hundred pages of fastpaced and exciting action is no mean feat.

The final detail of Wing-and-Wing that most importantly distinguishes it from the first five is the inversion of Cooper's earlier romantic ideals in the death of Raoul Yvard. The general orientation toward life that defines the romantic gallantry of the Rover and the Skimmer here undoes Raoul. This change reveals Cooper reasserting his belief in the necessity of piety, humility, and religious faith. We should note also that Wing-and-Wing charts a significant departure from the unreal romance of the earlier stories in that war has ceased to be exciting and glamorous. The participants are not less courageous,

but Cooper here begins to emphasize the great loss, the sad and unnecessary loss, that military conflict produces. Giving up life even for a deep-felt commitment to country now has at least a bitter-sweet result. This might at first seem due to America's not being one of the antagonists, but the waste and not the glamour of giving up one's life will be a continued emphasis in Cooper's next sea novel when America does occupy center stage.

Cooper's sixth sea tale reveals that his work remains otherworldly compared to the verisimilitude of, for example, Richard Henry Dana's Two Years Before the Mast or Melville's Redburn; but in 1842, he is moving in that direction, as indeed he must if he is to succeed in exploring explicitly moral and religious themes. Not wanting in these sea novels to adopt an allegorical style--a technique Cooper did employ in The Monikins--Cooper forces the characters and the action to become more true to life, for he wants his audience to be gripped and influenced by his attempt to communicate his moral and religious views.

This novel is Cooper's first nautical one whose theme is mainly religious. Moral issues have heretofore been abundant but not theological ones. Cooper obviously felt the sea offered a resource for religious themes, for most of his remaining sea novels will deal with religious questions, though in only one case will this be the central, focal point of the narrative, in his last, The Sea Lions.

If human existence is to be significant and meaningful, man must resist the temptations of the self; he must subdue "rampant individualism." As Helen Phinit-Akson explains in her study of Cooper's religious vision, Cooper at this point in his life "distrusted the undisciplined ego of limited human beings who, in spite of their reason, mistakenly believe that they can fathom all the mysteries of the world and thus control their own destinies."⁵⁹ This paramount concern of Cooper's may explain two important facts about his sea novels. His concern with the religious life and the potential danger of human egoism may account for the marked moralistic tone of his late sea novels and, more significantly, with their becoming less romantic, more realistic attempts to examine first questions of human existence. It is probably far-fetched to intimate that Cooper felt sinful in creating his romantic tales, yet I think his commitment to contributing to a better world, religiously speaking, strongly influenced him to produce more contemporary, realistic, and meaningful novels, as are all but one of the remaining sea tales he was to write. And we will not again encounter a pre-revolutionary America setting, for Cooper no longer wants to examine our abundant past; rather, it is our meager, godless, and faithless present that these remaining sea novels will treat. The only otherworldly aspect of Wing-and-Wing and the novels yet to be examined is the romantic, usually

far-away setting. But Cooper was gradually coming to realize that the nautical genre made available such settings as the virgin American Northwest, the Antarctic, and, of course, simply vast, empty ocean. The primary value of such locales is their effectiveness at being grand stages upon which Cooper could enact his religious dramas. We keenly sense Raoul's need for spiritual rebirth, just as his creator was everyday coming to recognize America's need for a spiritual rebirth.⁶⁰

Cooper's true feelings for the books and characters of his creation are revealed by scattered remarks in his letters and journals. Disappointing to one hoping to discover such matters as Cooper's fictional theories, what he intended with his novels, and so forth, the mundane letters, especially, seldom reveal a very serious artist. But Cooper would often become reflective when a correspondent offered comments and judgments of his books. One correspondent who did, and especially of the naval tales, was Commodore William Branford Shubrick. Cooper's letters to Shubrick are consistently his most revealing ones. In early December, 1842, Shubrick wrote a letter to Cooper in which he criticized some of the author's nautical errors in Wing-and-Wing. He tells Cooper that he has just read this novel to his wife and her two nieces: "'They like the book very much but prefer Two Admirals. They think it was

quite wrong in you to kill Sir Smees /Raoul Yvard/, that he should have been converted and married to Ghita--You must settle that point with them."⁶¹

Cooper's prompt answer reveals that he too finds The Two Admirals the better book of the two: the two admirals as characters "are great favorites of mine, and twenty Raoul Yvards can not put their noses out of joint with their papa As for marrying Ghita to that atheistical scamp, Raoul, the ladies must excuse me. I preferred killing him and putting her in a convent! My wife and my sister--a couple of Christians they are!--say that I have been too liberal to the Catholics."⁶² Except for Bolt's escape and success, Wing-and-Wing reverberates with poetic justice. Yet Cooper wrote in an autobiographical sketch to Rufus W. Griswold that Wing-and-Wing "is called a work of immoral tendency. Its proper place in the naval series is . . . about fourth, though, as to popularity, it is likely to stand second, or third."⁶³

My own judgment of Wing-and-Wing is that it remains today much more readable, believable, and meaningful than any of the earlier sea novels except for The Two Admirals. But the best that can be said about either of these novels is that each has relatively few egregious errors and improbabilities. Each is remote from Cooper's consummate best. I agree with Ringe that Wing-and-Wing presents a

moral complexity new to the sea fiction, but not for his reasons. Not because Bolt survives does this book present a morally complex world. Nor is it because Ghita and Raoul seem confronted with tough choices.⁶⁴ My discussion has stressed other aspects of the novel that give it a realistic effect new to the nautical tales. The most obvious of these is the antithetical treatment given Raoul, who is clearly a character in the mold of the Rover and the Skimmer--on the whole Cooper is more interested now in dramatizing didactic parables of sorts than in merely producing entertaining adventure. Wing-and-Wing is the beginning of a new purpose for Cooper as novelist. It is clearly not a novel of manners or a pure and simple tale of adventure. Its purpose exists on another plane, one that most of us regard as a higher one, including moral, philosophical, and religious concerns--all more important matters that art should usually work toward. But any high praise for this particular novel ought to be postponed until a comparable study of the sea novels of Cooper's last years will make evaluative judgments of the early ones more meaningful.

From this point on in his sea fiction, Cooper will continue to dramatize the necessity for man to confront and acknowledge the inadequacy of his reason to find truth. Man's salvation and hope of leading a full, meaningful life depend solely on his acceptance of the will of Providence and the theological disciplines of orthodox Christianity.

End-notes

49 Letters and Journals, IV, 181.

50 Letters and Journals, IV, 289.

51 The title of this novel is a seaman's expression for the configuration of full sails on a vessel. Cooper describes a ship sailing wing-and-wing as having "a sail fanning like the heavy pinions of a sea-fowl, on each side . . ." (p. 3).

52 Philbrick, James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction, p. 127.

53 W. C. Brownell, American Prose Masters, p. 40.

54 Dekker, James Fenimore Cooper: The American Scott, p. 198.

55 Wing-and-Wing (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, n.d.), p. 27. All references are to this edition.

56 Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 100.

57 Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 101.

58 Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 174.

59 H. Phinit-Akson, "James Fenimore Cooper: A Critical Study of His Religious Vision," Diss. University of Pittsburg 1973, p. 173.

60

There are innumerable remarks in Cooper's letters and journals that convey his concern over America's mediocrity and godlessness. James Beard in survey of these makes the following remarks: Cooper "found evidence of this 'moral eclipse'" (I, xxvi) everywhere he looked in the 1830s and 1840s. "Cooper saw, with relentless moral realism, that American life was increasingly dominated by selfish, extralegal combinations more powerful in the aggregate than the government itself. . . . The remedy Cooper urged, as the only source of responsible values, was a return to 'original principles,' that is, to a general recognition of the claims of a universal moral law underlying American institutions and all human experience" (I, xxvii).

61

Journals and Letters, IV 329.

62

Letters and Journals, IV, 328.

63

Letters and Journals, IV, 33.

64

See Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 100.

IV. Afloat and Ashore and Miles Wallingford: A Significant Contribution to the New Genre

"The puff of a coat imprisoning air:
A face kissing the water-death
A weary slow sway of a lost hand
And the sea, the moving sea, the sea."⁶⁵

In his Leatherstocking novels Cooper put the innocent and morally incorruptible Natty Bumppo within a virgin setting; however, Natty's encounter with the fresh, new world did not always result in sweetness and light. America was Edenic, but it was not pre-lapsarian. In Afloat and Ashore⁶⁶ Cooper experiments with a theme which interested Melville and which Henry James exploited: the innocent and righteous American initiated into the reality of the world, especially to the corruption, decay, and lurking evil, not only outside, but also within himself. Cooper's American characters also become exposed, therefore, to their mortal limits in avoiding and dealing with the evil in existence, both the overt and covert type.

Afloat and Ashore could have been entitled The Education of Miles Wallingford, for here Cooper continues the interest of his last two sea tales and which will give focus to those not yet written: having his protagonist confront the nature of reality and to discover, finally, that it is spiritual. Cooper carries Miles through a series of adventures until he can see clearly and is free of the obstacles, most of which stem from pride, that for a long

time blind him to the truth of himself and others and that interfere with his education into what for Cooper were the moral realities of life. In fact Miles undergoes various kinds of ordeals until in the climax of his development he reaches an understanding of his, and thus man's, rational limits, physical limits, and mortal limits. At this point he experiences in a transforming moment his utter dependence on God, the ultimate reality. Cooper makes clear throughout that Miles's experiences are meant to lead him to a moral and religious insight into the nature of man's existence. Miles succeeds then where Raoul Yvard failed, and when he does he is rewarded with the return of his great loss and privation: Miles regains a state of innocence and renewal in his offspring, and he has returned to him his lost Eden.

Miles's journey begins as sad and disheartening, for although he voluntarily, even surreptitiously goes to sea at a young age, Miles leaves behind two angelic creatures, his sister Grace and their lifelong acquaintance Lucy Harding; and he must also temporarily abandon his family estate, the beautiful, fertile, and Edenic Clawbonny. Here have lived three generations of his forefathers which give to the place a certain strength and security. Miles senses this and intuits a kind of meaning in the tradition of the Wallingford estate at Clawbonny, a lasting thing in a rapidly changing world. And being a part of this,

Miles feels innocent and uncorrupt. As he and Rupert Harding, Lucy's brother, prepare to leave this world of their infancy and youth in quest of maturity through adventure and ordeal, Miles regards himself as "morally invulnerable."⁶⁷ He leaves Clawbonny feeling "very green in most things that related to the world" (p. 34). By Miles's leaving home on a conscious journey toward manhood, his sea-going experiences will function as a symbolic rite of passage. The sea, therefore, becomes a stage on which he will act out this maturation process.

Miles is deeply grieved as he and Rupert watch the Clawbonny shore recede as they depart for New York, but Rupert, who functions as a foil for Miles throughout the novel, and who in his morally void condition of absolute selfishness and egoism proves to be a cad, a liar, and an unredeemed villain, feels no loss, for "where Rupert was, there was his paradise" (p. 35). This selfishness will finally be recognized in Rupert by all the other characters, for he gives no allegiance and sees no power outside himself--neither honor, place, nor religion--nothing has substance for Rupert beyond what gratifies his personal wants. Afloat and Ashore is about the things that man should value and order his life around. Rupert, who orders his life only around himself, is, therefore, an abject villain. Miles tells us that Rupert was "always somewhat obtuse on the subject of morals" (p. 38), so he

represents one unviable life style for Miles to be exposed to and reject.

Once in New York, Miles and Rupert soon sign up on a ship and the first of many voyages begins. On all of Miles's voyages, both as mate and later as Captain and owner, he is involved in truly exciting chases, captures, and escapes. He encounters pirates, smugglers, press-gangs from England and France, typhoons, and every nature of disaster that can befall a ship at sea. In this way the novel is much broader in scope than any of the earlier sea tales. I will not discuss details of these many adventures unless they reveal aspects of the moral struggles and education of Miles, but they do make for stirring reading in this longest but certainly the most readable and interesting of all of Cooper's sea tales.

Miles makes a habit of commenting, after each of the hair-breadth escapes he survives, casually and uncritically on Providence's role, such as when he and Neb live through a frightfully stormy night: "Providence had guided us through the hours of darkness" (p. 85). These frequent comments are automatic and insignificant as regards Miles's character. Moreover, when Miles at one point finds himself in the middle of the wide Atlantic "in a mere shell of a boat" (p. 77), this threat and his feelings of insecurity cause him to reflect wistfully on the peace and security of Clawbonny. Such situations and thoughts represent a

motif in the novel as Miles many times is made to think of his far-away paradise. One is reminded here too of Melville's Ishmael who leaves the safety of the shore to know the void. Miles's experiences are not quite so symbolic as Ishmael's and he does not suffer existential angst, but he does seek to encounter reality, and to be tested, and to know what it is to leave his fetal paradise of Clawbonny. And in this concern Cooper shows himself to be in the mainstream of 19th century American literature of Hawthorne, Melville, and James, for he knows Miles must venture forth to cast out "filament, filament out of himself." He may not be doing anything so grand as seeking the evil in the human heart or the ambiguous truth represented by the white whale, but nonetheless to journey into reality, away from the safe confines of his ancestral home, friends, and family, Miles Wallingford pursues a rite of passage on the sea. Miles is partaking of the great American theme of ordeal for the young and innocent naif. Of course only one adventuresome voyage would be unCooperian, so Miles undergoes many in this heavily episodic novel. After each voyage Miles returns to Clawbonny, as if for succor. When he arrives after his first voyage, his home looks to him more beautiful than ever: "Everything denoted peace, plenty, and happiness" (p. 105). And after each return Miles soliloquizes on why he leaves the "blessings and security" (p. 106) of his home for the sudden and

hidden dangers afloat. One point of the novel is to pose this question and attempt an answer.

Whenever Miles is ashore his schooling in morality continues. At Clawbonny this comes mainly from his observing the dastardly Rupert who "was not, in a rigid sense, a lad of truth" (p. 108). At this point, however, Miles is still young and has not yet hardened into the pessimist that many of Cooper's critics see the author developing into in his later years: "I was not old enough then to understand that most of the statements that float about the world are nothing but truth distorted, and that nothing is more rare than unadulterated fact" (p. 109). This type of statement causes many readers of Cooper to concentrate on his treatment of the conflict and discrepancy between appearance and reality, and it is indeed true this theme runs throughout Cooper's work. But Miles's main concern in Afloat and Ashore is not to see through deception and facade so much as it is to discover the truth in himself. For reality, the ultimate truth in life which Cooper thought man could approach, is discovered within the soul of man. And in these late sea novels the drama is very personal, with each individual undergoing his private trials and ordeals to know himself and his relationship to God.

One of the more obvious concerns in Afloat and Ashore, but one whose religious significance might be overlooked,

is the frequent musing by Miles on the constant change in America, such as when he contrasts the Trinity and Wall Street of ten years before and the present; but Miles seriously searches for stability, stays against the flux, and he suspects the only ones he knows are his sister and Lucy, and Clawbonny. He is sobered by thoughts of "the temporary character of our probationary state in this world" (p. 117). As he prepares for his second voyage, which he suspects may last three years, he worries that the world will move on and his place will be gone: "Terrible ages in perspective were these, and which seemed to us pregnant with as many changes as the life of a man" (p. 124). Ultimately, Miles will come to see family and tradition in Clawbonny, and with his faith in Providence that God manipulates change for the best, which is the insight with which the novel ends.

Miles's next voyage is aboard the Crisis, whose first mate Moses Marble will shortly become Miles's Chingachgook. The voyage is uneventful, but once Miles is in London his initiation and education quicken. Miles discovers in London much of what Melville's Redburn later does, change for the worse and decay of traditions. From the time he arrives, Miles must resist corruption, represented by customs officials, smugglers, prostitutes, and so forth. Throughout this ordeal Miles constantly asserts both his and America's innocence and moral superiority, suggesting

the emblematic role Cooper saw his young New Yorker playing. Like America, Miles is "a child yet" (p. 158). But this exposure to a corrupt old world reminds Miles of the flux of America where "The whole nation is in motion" (p. 158). As he has done before, Miles maintains his moral confidence; he sees himself being tested, and he consciously resists corruption. To do so, he must at times separate himself from his country, for "America is the avaricious country"; "Money is the great end of American life" (p. 167). This is the new country's great sin. Cooper so continually makes this point in his late sea novels that it is obvious he saw monetary corruption as one of contemporary man's grievous problems.⁶⁸

There are obviously many opportunities aboard a ship at sea for one to muse on the immense space of water, for man's delicate predicament on earth, his tenuous survival, can no where be felt so keenly. It is this quality of the oceans that Cooper does not exploit in his nautical tales until Afloat and Ashore, and so it is not until this novel that he begins to use the full resources of the genre and to make the setting organic, functional, and thematic. The availability of moments of challenge, discovery, and insight are great in such a setting. And so it is throughout this book that Miles ponders man's situation in an environment that is constantly potentially hostile. At one point on the voyage home the Crisis is lost and

buffeted by strong weather, making Miles feel that they are driven "like events ruled by fate." When at such times the seamen have lost control of the ship, the standard response is that they are now "guided by Providence" (p. 186), which is as automatic and unthinking as is a similar earlier response by Miles. One point of Miles's peregrinating is his need to realize his dependency on cliches.

Cooper devotes some chapters of Afloat and Ashore to lengthy discussion topics, usually of a social or moral nature. And so in Chapter XII there is an interesting essay on the "elastic morals" of pirates and merchants and on the whole group of "mercantile moralists" (p. 189). Miles tiptoes over the difficult question of when free trade becomes smuggling and vice versa. But Miles is never caught short of confidence in his innocence: His rationalizing is reminiscent of that of Captain Cuffe in the Water-Witch. Captain Williams of the Crisis carries off extralegal plunder from South America in exchange for London goods. Miles is uncertain whether he should be concerned with his role in these maneuverings:

I do not know whether I am bound, or not, to apologize for my own agency in these irregular transactions,--regular would be quite as apposite a word,--for, had I been disposed to murmur, it would have done my morals no good, nor the smuggling any harm. (p. 190)

Seeking advice from the wordly Moses Marble, Miles discovers him to hold the convenient belief

that coasts, bays, inlets, roadsteads, and heavens were all intended by nature as means to run goods ashore wherever the duties or prohibitions render it inconvenient to land them in the more legal mode. Smuggling, in his view of the matter, was rather more creditable than the regular commerce, since it required greater cleverness. (p. 190)

Even though he is in some ways a naive American new man, Miles is susceptible to profitable moral backsliding.

At this point of the narrative we reach the crucial and pivotal episode in Book I and in Miles's moral education. As the discussion of smuggling and freetrade continues, the Crisis--and we will now see the aptness of the ship's name--reaches the remote Northwest coast of America. "At that time," Miles observes, "the whole northwest coast was unoccupied by the white men, and I felt no scruples about trading with the natives who presented themselves with their skins as soon as we had anchored, believing that they had the best right to the country and its products. We passed months in this traffic, getting, at every point where we stopped, something to pay us for our trouble" (p. 191). As they near the shore an Indian boards the ship and helps steer her to a secure berth where, the heathen assures them, there is a bounty of Otter skins, which are their main interest, as the Indian knows. It occurs to Miles that

a "more unpromising-looking guide never had charge of smuggling Christians" (p. 191). Even though Cooper makes the subtle ironies to obvious by pointing them all out too us, this is easily the most interesting and profound situation we have yet encountered in any of the sea tales.

The crew are rightly suspicious of violence and treachery from the savages, but they all, especially the officers, are so blinded by greed that they convince themselves of their own safety. As Cooper so often does in the Leatherstocking tales, he here has the white crew smugly comment on the uncouth state and general ignorance and backwardness of the heathens. The Indians are called "Smudge, Tinpot, and Slit-nose. These were not heroic names, of a certainty, but their owners had as little of the heroic in their appearance as usually falls to the lot of one man in the savage state" (p. 192). Despite this attitude, the Indians are clearly not so degraded that these Christian adventurers would decline the chance to trade (and rob) them, for "Commerce, like misery, sometimes makes a man acquainted with strange bed-fellows" (p. 193).

This whole serio-comic and ironic episode is made possible by Miles's frequent insistence that the Indians are as ignorant, backward, and uncivilized as any men he has encountered. The innocent Miles and the rest willfully and eagerly commit the sin of pride against these fellow human beings; this was a sin about which Cooper was in

agreement with Hawthorne, that is, in its being crucially important to the fate of man. Miles sits looking

at the semi-human being who was seated opposite, wondering at the dispensation of divine Providence which could leave one endowed with a portion of the ineffable nature of the Deity, in a situation so degraded. I had seen beasts in cages that appeared to me to be quite as intelligent, and members of diversified family of human caricatures, or of the baboons and monkeys, that I thought were quite as agreeable objects to the eye. Smudge seemed to be almost without ideas. (p. 195)

So again in Cooper's fiction we encounter the incredibly smug and self-righteous attitude that so many Americans held toward Indians. A century after the first fanatical Puritans, they still regarded the natives, at best, as simply sub-humans, and, at worst, as devils unworthy of life. Afloat and Ashore will quickly make clear that such an attitude is in its insufficiency ridiculous. Despite everyone's feelings of moral and spiritual superiority to the Indians, the crew look on this place as a trading-post, and happy they are it is without custom-house officers. The Americans are almost able to convince themselves to be watchful lest the Indians attempt robbery, but they complacently decide that even the leaders of the savages have not "brains enough. . . . I never saw such a vacancy in a human form" (p. 196).

This scene is another instance of Cooper's fault of overindulging himself, and the obvious and bitter irony

evident from the sailors' remarks removes any suspicion that they will leave this outpost unscathed. Yet it is interesting how closely the situation parallels Melville's "Benito Cereno." The disguise and mask, with reality denied the prideful whites until it is almost too late, is as much a study of pride and evil in Cooper as it is in Melville.

Cooper's nautical characters in these late novels are just as concerned with understanding reality, and they just as often confront the difficulty of this task as do Melville's characters. I adopt a tone of urgent conviction in presenting this idea because anyone conversant with Cooper's early nautical novels would be understandably hesitant to compare Cooper with Melville, especially with Melville at his best. But the issue, it must be noted, in this "Smudge" episode is not, as is often argued,⁶⁹ that the world is full of deceptive surfaces; nor is Miles's education one in which he learns only of the conflict between appearance and reality. For the confusion, uncertainty, and mistakes of these adventures are subjective ones. It is man's own moral blindness, usually due to pride stemming from greed and self-righteousness, that makes impossible this accurate perception of objective reality. Cooper is just as unsympathetic as Hawthorne in "The Minister's Black Veil" and James in "The Beast in the Jungle" to the solipsist. The Indians' ruse in Afloat and

Ashore is not a poor one, but it succeeds only because the Christian travelers have morally so inflexible an attitude toward the natives and so pliant a one in regard to their smuggling. They, themselves, are completely responsible for their own undoing.

The crew of the Crisis have far less reason to feel deceived and undone by some external evil than does, for example, Isabel Archer in The Portrait of a Lady. All the signs of danger are there, but the rationalizations their greed allows them are blinding. They even find some remains of an earlier ship, appropriately named The Sea Otter, for it is for this animal's skins that they overstay themselves in this area. The crew are at first apprehensive over the ominous discovery of the ship's wreckage, but "A night of reflection had quieted our fears, and we all woke up the next morning, as indifferent to the fate of The Sea Otter as was at all decent" (p. 203). Once moral equivocating begins, Cooper implies, its continuance is a simple matter.

Miles's education takes a remarkable leap one night when he is on guard with two Indians, one of them Smudge, and while Miles is lost in thought about Clawbonny, Grace, and Lucy, the Indians suddenly capture him, kill Captain Williams, and take over the Crisis, locking the rest of the crew below decks. As Babo in "Benito Cereno" is revealed to be, to Captain Delano's stunned surprise, the

mastermind and spirit of the revolutionary blacks, Smudge proves to be this to the Indians. It is knowledge which most overwhelms Miles: "I found that Smudge, the semi-human, dull, animal-seeming was at the head. . . . This master-spirit was Smudge!" (p. 212). That this has been a contribution to Miles's moral knowledge is made clear by the "moral" which concludes the first part of this episode: "Unpromising as he seemed, this fellow had a spirit that fitted him for great achievements, and which, under other circumstances, might have made him a hero. He taught me the useful lesson of not judging of men merely by their exteriors" (p. 219). This may be all that Miles believes he learns from the experience, but Cooper obviously intends his audience to see much more.

The heroic potential of the Indian leader causes Miles a moral dilemma. The next series of actions take place very quickly, but Cooper writes them well and believably. Mainly through Miles's expertise and artifice, the ship is recaptured, with some Indians killed. The scene from the whites' point of view is mostly joyous, certainly relieved, but Miles now feels responsible for the well-being of the Indians, and he balks at revenging the Captain's death, as Marble, who is now in charge, orders. Marble wants to leave the surviving Indians with an example of the whites' retributive justice. Curiously, Marble decides to let two of the blacks of the crew perform the handing of

Smudge; for he was "too dignified to turn Jack Ketch in person, and unwilling to set any of the white seamen at so ungracious an office." They all shrink from the odium of such a "revolting duty" (p. 234).

As Miles describes the actually triumphal behavior of Smudge, one is reminded of the execution concluding Billy Budd. The overwhelming "necessity" in Afloat and Ashore is revenge, a motive rooted in wounded pride:

I now perceived Smudge looking upward, seeming to comprehend the nature of the fate that awaited him. The deeply-seated principle within him caused a dark shadow to pass over a countenance already so gloomy and wrinkled by suffering and exposure; and he turned his look wistfully toward Marble, at whose command each order in succession was, for a single moment, in hope he would relent, and let the wretch go. But Marble had persuaded himself he was performing a great act of nautical justice; nor was he aware, himself, how much he was influenced by a feeling allied to vengeance. (p. 235)

The final paragraph of the Smudge episode, which has become an odious "smudge" on their escutcheon even as it happens, on their personal and national honor and morality, sums up the various base motives, all germinating from greed and pride, which begins and ends this affair:

At a later day, the account of this affair found its way into the newspapers at home. A few moralists endeavored to throw some doubts over the legality and necessity of the proceedings, pretending that more evil than good was done to the cause of sacred justice by such disregard of law and principles; but the feeling of trade, and the security of ships when far from

home, were motives too powerful to be put down by the still, quiet remonstrances of reason and light. The abuses to which such practices would be likely to lead, in cases in which one of the parties constituted himself the law, the judge, and the executioner, were urged in vain against the active and ever-stimulating incentive of a love of gold. Still, I knew that Marble wished the thing undone when it was too late, it being idle to think of quieting the suggestions of that monitor God has implanted within us, by the meretricious and selfish approbation of those who judge of right and wrong by their own narrow standard of interest. 70 (p. 235)

Cooper stresses often in his fiction and non-fiction that greed and self are man's own worst enemies and are antithetical to God.

It seems to me that the critics have failed to evaluate correctly the meaning of Smudge in the narrative and the treatment the Indians receive. Donald Ringe cites the guise of the Indians as an example of the "unforeseeable evil" that is everywhere and of the "unending conflict between appearance and reality."⁷¹ And does not this explanation seem probable too, at first glance? Thomas Philbrick points out that Cooper's addition to the historical source of this incident is the hanging itself. Philbrick stresses, and rightly I think, "the revolution that occurs in Miles's judgement of the relative worth of the Indians and the whites."⁷² But he also emphasizes the lesson in appearance and reality that Miles learns, and he ends with the curious

idea that the whites' triumph is a "moral disaster. . . . Now Smudge is the whole man and Marble is something less than human."⁷³ As Mark Twain might have said, Marble's problem is that his behavior has been all too human, and this is one lesson Miles must learn.

But what is left unsaid in these conclusions on the Smudge affair is what can be also missed in Melville's "Benito Cereno." Delano should divine the "hidden" evil of Babo and his crew through his own sense of guilt and responsibility for the treatment of blacks in the slave trade. But his own pride and self-righteousness, and his country's, prevent this self-recognition and obscure him from recognizing his own culpability. Similarly, the crew of the Crisis, Miles included, should easily see through the ruse. The hints at the true state of affairs are obvious, at least to the reader. The only "hidden" evil they are struggling against is their own blind spots. But here their greed and cupidity prohibit their seeing the truth; man's pride and the Americans' special conceit promote rationalization. Even the naïf Miles is easily able to explain to himself his various moral compromises.

Throughout these late sea novels Cooper puts his characters through ordeals until they are finally able to shed their false pride and see clearly. This begins with Raoul Yvard, who either fails to see or who is

simply too tardy. So beginning with Miles we witness individuals who undergo a kind of dark night of the soul until they finally reach the light of religious truth, until they can recognize their utter dependence on God's direction when they are able to perceive that the nature of reality is spiritual. In Afloat and Ashore this climax does not occur for several hundred pages. Miles's initiation, education, and purification is long and arduous.

The Crisis sails on, is captured by the French, and then recaptured by her crew after they escape. But the Smudge episode has had a subtle though powerful effect on Moses Marble who, despite his rough and gnarly exterior, is really sensitive and alone. Uneducated and unrefined, Marble was a foundling and gained his name from his foundling namesake and from the cemetery fixture he was abandoned by. Marble perhaps feels that his treatment of the Indians has made him unfit to cohabit with the rest of society, for he chooses to remain on an island when their group is temporarily stranded there. Miles tries to reassure his first mate (they have now traded positions, with Miles as captain, because Marble feels unfit for that position) by emphasizing that "'we are all of the same family my friend" (p. 311); and, indeed, they all must share the guilt. Cooper devotes so much space to Marble at this point in the novel because the foundling's search for a family, tradition, and for love is a major subplot in the rest of

the story. What Marble lacks brings into relief Miles's enormous wealth, and makes obvious the need for the young man to appreciate the worth of what he has and is a part of. In fact, Miles lectures Marble on man's natural aversion to living alone and the indispensable nature of society, but Marble is firm in his decision to remain a Robinson Crusoe and thereby escape from society and into nature and solitude.

Except for one brief voyage, the remainder of the first volume of Afloat and Ashore takes place on land where Miles continues his lessons in living. Ashore he is constantly being made aware of social distinctions which contrast with the natural aristocracy afloat, suggesting that the two settings of the book's title are Cooper's attempt to make Miles's education as total as possible. He sees in New York the continuing struggle between morals and the dollar, and as always he sees Clawbonny as fresh, New York as corrupt and vile. Throughout these chapters we have an example of the early novel of manners. Cooper's rendering of the social and cultural matrix of New York in the early 19th century is not so detailed or insightful as William Dean Howells would later write but still we gain a sense of social complications and of upper-class lifestyles. Yet these same chapters also lack a tight organization, and Miles's consciousness is the only unifying element:⁷⁴

he discourses briefly on fortune hunters who, he suspects,

are pursuing Grace, who has been made an heiress through a distant relative's death. Miles himself feels that since he is a sailor, he is outside the social world. There is also a diatribe on lies and the meanness of gossiping, and an attack on the Puritans who, with their introspection, probably originated gossip.

Since Miles's voyages tend to last from one to three years, each time he returns there have been great changes. Cooper conveys much of this change through Rupert who becomes more of a scoundrel each year, and since he from the first has lacked the reverence for place and tradition, Rupert represents the detached, uprooted figure that many English and other Europeans thought was typical of all Americans. Yet while ashore at Clawbonney Miles always devotes time to celebrate the joy he feels at just being there: ". . . I experienced the happiness of looking at objects my ancestors loved to regard, and which always have had a strong and near interest with me" (p. 508). Thus it bothers Miles that foreign critics of America call Americans a "migratory race, and that we do not love the sticks and stones that surround us, but quit the paternal roof without regret, and consider the play-grounds of infancy as only so much land for market" (p. 508). Such a description applies to Cooper's villains: in Afloat and Ashore to Rupert, in The Sea Lions to the old parson,

and in The Water-Witch to the Alderman. Book I of this novel comes to an end with Miles more completely than ever recognizing and appreciating the value to him of his family and Clawbonny.

On the other hand, it is Rupert who is capable of saying what some readers have mistakenly assumed was Cooper's own view: "'Nothing is permanent in boyhood; we grow in our persons, and our minds, sentiments, affections, views, hopes, and wishes, and ambition all take new directions'" (p. 458). Rupert's tone is not, however, nostalgic or yearning, nor is a sense of loss foremost. Rather, he smugly anticipates new times, places, and people; he is Emersonian in his presentness. Yet Miles's education is simultaneously leading him back--back to Clawbonny, to responsibility within a heritage, to make a family, and so forth. Rupert's selfishness, his exclusive concern for only himself, and his squandering and greed all help to point Miles toward those virtues and morals recommended by the conservative and traditionalist that Cooper was.

Within the flux which Miles must sort out at each return is one still-point: Mr. Harding, Lucy and Rupert's father, who is a moral and spiritual touchstone for Miles throughout. Miles remarks, for example, that Mr. Harding is not a Puritan since he stresses love not fear. However the good parson has one mortal failing, one blindspot;

his paternal love for his son prohibits him from seeing through the sham Rupert erects and operates behind. His father does not recognize Rupert's abominable acts, the most heinous of which, for Miles, is Rupert's rejection of Grace as his future wife. Through too many chapters Grace grieves over the alienation of affection, finally dying in one of Cooper's most drawn-out, sentimental death scenes.

Grace is characteristic of many of Cooper's females; she is a moral and religious figure, but as her death approaches she becomes positively angelic, more of the next world than this. Miles sees her as a kind of sacrifice for man's cruelty and sin, for she is "grieving over the sins of man. She is too saintly . . . to be subject, herself, to the passions of earth" (p. 483). If Mr. Harding represents the official figure of religion and righteous life, Grace is the lay equivalent. Together they are to Miles types of lives devoted to God. But in his younger days, he is not inclined to pursue a religious life or to regard the morality of his acts as supremely important.

Early in Book II we learn that Moses Marble was unable to remain on the uninhabited island, and back in his vicinity of Clawbonny he happens to come across his long-lost mother, who is a pious, humble, and religious old woman. Miles attributes this fortuitous discovery to "inscrutable providence" (p. 32). Moses's old mother

is able to offer her son little besides love and affection, but Marble, heretofore the antithesis of Miles, now loses his feelings of being alone in the world and of having no place, since now he inherits a name, a history, ancestors, and a sense of place, albeit a very meager one. Cooper's bringing Marble back into the narrative comes as no surprise. The crusty old tar is likable and represents in his unrefined crudity a nice contrast to the more debonair Miles. But Cooper's expertise at plotting and character development can also be demonstrated with this apparent digression into Marble's unlikely reunion with his mother.

Cooper uses the reunion of Marble and his mother to chastise once again America's greedy, mercantile society. The old lady's small home and scant property are mortgaged, the note being held by a vampire of a man who says, "'Trade is so lively now, Mr. Wallingford, that men will almost sell their souls for money'" (p. 40). Marble's "coming home" prompts Lucy to say that "'Family affection is a blessed thing and . . . there is little that can compensate for its loss'" (p. 60). This remark has obvious significance in both the major and minor plot. In fact, Marble's love for family is likened to a religious feeling, for now he finds himself at peace with the whole human family except--and this seems his God-sent test--for landlords. When

Mr. Harding tells Marble that he should have love even for his mother's landlord, he is "struck with the profound morality" of this remark, "a morality which no human heart appears to be so insensible as not in secret to acknowledge its sublimity" (p. 70). As we have seen, this is a precept Miles can utter, though its overwhelming truth is yet to be made manifest to him.

Miles feels pain often when he is home and is made aware of the Edenic existence of his childhood that seems forever gone out of his adult life. He knows estrangement and the pain of his maturity. This difficult knowledge reaches a climax of sorts when Grace leaves the world "that is not good enough for one so innocent and pure" (p. 76). At the time of her death, however, the simple-minded black servants of Clawbonny, as Cooper portrays them, express their hopes that Lucy and Miles marry, for they sense that in this union order will be reaffirmed and happy times will return. At times Lucy tells Miles that their childhood days are gone forever: Rupert is too much in sin ever to resume the charmed circle, and now Grace's death signifies the new, adult world Miles feels condemned to inhabit. On her deathbed Grace looks forward to death because in this she sees the ultimate reunification of the family, that which life has sundered. She foresees "'a communion free from all sin and governed by holiness'" (p. 93). As her death approaches, she says, calmly, "'It will be but an

hour, and we shall all be together again'" (p. 107). And clearly Miles responds, for despite his continuously venturing forth on the ocean, despite this wunderlust, he is really searching for a return of those times of goodness and innocence that Grace glimpses in her last hours. His whole life's effort is a kind of unconscious attempt to recover the Paradise of which he feels bereft. In fact, as Miles goes outdoors after one of his final interviews with Grace, he notices and keenly feels evidence of the Divine Creator in "the rural loveliness of my native fields" (p. 109).

The events which prepare Miles for his final and complete trial and conversion are few. His uncle John Wallingford, who is at Clawbonny for Grace's funeral, approaches Miles with the proposition that they each make the other his benefactor so that in the event anything should befall either one, their lands and possessions will be certain to remain in the Wallingford family. This is, of course, yet another indication of how important family and the things of a family have now become to everyone. Ironically, however, John Wallingford convinces Miles to mortgage the family estate so that his next voyage on the ship he has nearly depleted his ready cash to buy can return a large profit. The name of this ship is the Dawn, a very appropriate name for the place of the climax of Miles's moral and religious education. I

suppose we can see Miles's succumbing to the mercantile profit motive, yet he generally has little regard for money. This is one affliction he is without. Curiously, though, despite his saying that Clawbonny is too "venerable and venerated to be mortgaged" (p. 152), he mortgages it nonetheless. His intense misgivings over this act are immediate, and an ominous and somber tone pervades the novel from this point until its end.

The voyage soon gets underway, and the many chapters it occupies present exciting and rousing adventure. There are various battles, captures, escapes, recaptures, and so forth. Miles enjoys various temporary successes, but many months after his departure from the family estate he finally finds himself with a crew of only three in the Irish sea facing a violent storm. Cooper creates a charged atmosphere with "forebodings of evil" (p. 300) on the "chaos of waters" (p. 305). The Dawn is gradually torn apart and in the upheaval both Marble and Neb are swept overboard, leaving Miles alone on board the slowly sinking vessel. He is able to keep the craft afloat for a few more days so as to bring his own climactic epiphany about gradually. His thoughts in these dire straits are not, perhaps heroically, on his own imminent death but on his companions; he wishes only that they could all die together. His personal feelings of grief center on thoughts of Clawbonny. Although John holds the mortgage, Miles intuitively feels that everything is

lost; and to Miles at this nadir, Clawbonny is the all, for it and Lucy have been all he has ever wanted.

This scene with Miles solitary on a sinking ship beyond sight of land offers a logical and compelling stage for his conversion. He has been stripped of his power and resources, but he does not despair as Dickinson does over their not being "a Chance, or Spar-- / Or even a Report of Land-- / To justify--Despair." Instead, he kneels and prays, now that he has been made to feel keenly his insufficiencies and limits. When he rises with both a sense of resignation and hope, it is clear that Cooper is concerned here not with any specific religious dogma or with social religion, but instead, as intimated in Wing-and-Wing, with a test of faith, a religion of the ordeal. "It seemed as if the birds and the fishes had abandoned me to my loneliness" (p. 315), thinks Miles, as he gazes out onto the wide and empty expanse of ocean. But this moment of intense experience is a preparation for a deeper religious conversion:

We must all yield up our lives once; and though my hour came rather early, it should be met as a man meets everything, even to death itself.

Some time before the sun set, I went aloft to take a last look at the ocean. I do not think any desire to prolong my existence carried me up the mast, but there was a lingering wish to look after my mate. The ocean beamed gloriously that eventide, and I fancied that it was faintly reflecting

the gracious countenance of its divine Creator, in a smile of beneficent love. I felt my heart soften, as I gazed around me, and I fancied heavenly music was singing the praises of God on the face of the great deep. Then I knelt in the top and prayed. (p. 317)

This scene contrasts sharply with the sentiment of Stephen Crane's "Man Adrift on a Slim Spar." Cooper's own faith marks strongly and clearly the mood of this scene.

No sooner does Miles utter this Hemingwayesque resignation than he decides to resign his resignation in his keenly perceived need of one human being for his fellow. So not only do Miles's moral and religious experiences quicken and focus his attention on man's inevitable and narrow limits, which sweeps a sense of humility and his dependence on a benevolent Creator into his heart, but he also realizes the need for humanity, man's responsibility for man. This is indeed a complete and total education and revelation. With this dark night of travail behind him, Miles commits himself to survival and to the recovery of his mates.

Miles is soon rewarded in these endeavors where Raoul Yvard failed and was destroyed. Although neither Grace nor Lucy has ever had to chastise and preach to Miles to find God in his heart and to make the concept of humility indigenous to his being, as Ghita attempted with Raoul, Miles will anyway, as Roswell Gardiner will next in The Sea Lions. In a different way, Ned Myers too reaches an

understanding of himself and God, though the emphasis with Ned is his own sense of sin and the need for salvation. Miles is without Ned's sin of loose living, but he still has participated in the Smudge episode. He does come to see the necessity of salvation as he finally, like Job, thanks God for all that has happened to him. He is deeply grieved over the loss of Clawbonny, but when he is finally open to the news of God, all creature comforts are recognized in the earthly limits which define them: "I knelt again, and prayed to that dread being, with whom, it now appeared to me, I stood alone in the center of the universe" (p. 321). Could Jonathan Edwards ask for a more charged and complete vision of one's relationship to the Almighty?

Finally the Dawn sinks, but on this same day Miles and his crew, who had earlier been thought lost at sea, are rejoined when Neb and Marble miraculously reappear. Their survival and reunion under such circumstances is quickly attributed to "the mercy of divine Providence" (p. 332). And just as suddenly a ship passes along and delivers them all from a watery grave. Such good fortune, Cooper seems to say, is only just reward for Miles's moment of illumination. For his true and clear epiphanic vision of God, humility, and faith, Miles is plucked out of the pit.

The ship that rescues the three mates is captained by a benign and wise Captain Rowley. Whereas Miles in his youthful pride and prejudice had always thought one country

was naturally superior or inferior to another--and this is an idea often present among Cooper's uninformed characters, especially among those in Homeward Bound--he learns from Captain Rowley that such pride and prejudice show an ignorance over the uncertainty of mundane events. As they prepare to battle a French ship, which causes Miles to think the victory will be an easy one, Rowley says:

"'I am too old, and have seen too much service, Wallingford, not to know that every battle is liable to accidents and vicissitudes. There is some difference in service, I must suppose, though not half so much as in men as is vulgarly imagined. The result is in the hands of God, and I do think we are fighting his battles, in this fearful war'" (p. 345). Later Rowley is mortally wounded, and when Miles finally brings him the news that "'You are master of the French frigate; he replies 'Master!--am I my master of my own life? Of what use is victory to me now? I shall die--die soon, Wallingford, and there will be an end of it all! My poor wife will call this a melancholy victory'" (p. 354). This is obviously a sobering attitude to the typical Cooperian hero figure who gladly gives up all to some cause or other. However, it seems to me a mistake to regard such an incident and speech as evidence of Cooper's "mature" pessimism. Captain Rowley's death does indicate the precariousness of life. Cooper has never suggested that life and the future are certain for

man; indeed not. But the point of this incident in the novel is the effect on Miles, what he learns, and not that we should all grieve morosely over a good man's passing. One effect is to continue the book's demonstration that war is not romantic and that a hero's death is little more than death. One sees quickly that the mood of this episode and the dialogue between Rowley and Miles is singularly alien to the romance of war in The Pilot, The Red Rover, or The Water-Witch.

This episode is without question essential for the illumination of Miles's youthful eyes. But we would err in arguing that Rowley's disillusioned death gave such a mood to the whole novel. After all, we are still many pages from the novel's conclusion and many from the resolution of Miles's fortunes, which make up the main focus of the novel. Moreover, what Rowley is so grievously losing directs Miles once again to the meaning and non-material worth of Clawbonny and family. Raoul Yvard had a similar opportunity to learn the folly of his swashbuckling and the danger of his fiery pride, but he failed to escape self and find God. Death, then, especially of an explicit Father figure for Miles opens his eyes by providing him with an important perspective from which to view life:

The near view of death places a man on a moral eminence, whence he commands prospects before and behind, on each side and on every side, enabling him to overlook the whole scene of life from its commencement to its close, and to form an

opinion of his own place in a drama that is about to close. Like many of those who exhibit themselves for our amusement, and to purchase our applause, he is only too apt to quit the stage satisfied with his own performances, than the thoughtless multitude, who, regarding merely the surfaces of things, are too often loudest in their approbation when there is the least to praise. (p. 355)

This voyage continues for some time more, but Miles does finally return to America, with his friends and in good health but several months late, to discover that Clawbonny has been sold and that he is "no longer the owner of my father's house" (p. 372). His Uncle John Wallingford has died suddenly and a Mr. Dagget has bought the whole estate for a pittance at auction. But the despair and poverty resulting from this news are short-lived as John Wallingford's will is discovered which gives not only Clawbonny back to Miles but most of John's vast holdings as well; so, like Job, Miles is rewarded many fold for his faith. As he stands gazing on his Eden-regained, a most "inviting scene of rural quiet and loveliness," Lucy calls this event a "'blessed restoration'" (p. 417).

Miles is certainly not the only character to be deeply effected by this near tragedy and near loss of his essence, for Marble too has come to understand better the meaning of both place and family, as well as love. The man who was once self-marooned now says: "'Well, Miles, you seem to value this land of yours, as a seaman does his ship. . . . Next thing to being a bloody hermit, I hold, is to belong

to nobody in a crowded world; and I would not part with one kiss from little Kitty, or one wrinkle of my mother's face for all the desert islands in the ocean'" (p. 421). This recognition represents the climax of one of the novel's themes. Miles's complete recovery includes his betrothal to Lucy, who once again is presented as the clear-eyed, moralistic character who both sees and knows the truth and who is least self-deceived. As the sage-like Marble now tells Miles, "Make-believe is much made use of in this world, but it won't hold out to the last. Now, of all mortal beings that I ever met with, you've fallen in love with her that has the least of it" (p. 422). And make-believe emphasizes man's willing self-deception rather than appearance and reality existing in a state of perfidious duplicity.

Cooper ends Afloat and Ashore with a hasty summary of the fates of all the major characters. Always annoying to one who is fond of maintaining some aura of believability and credence in the narration, at least here the summary is consistent with the themes Cooper has developed, and it even brings them to a climax.

Rupert, for example, whose vanity and selfishness have made him a scoundrel throughout, and who cared nothing for place, tradition, or family, dies while still a young man, and he is survived by only his wife and daughter. It is proper in the moral scheme Cooper has set up that this

rogue's name should die. Also his wife, Emily, who is contrasted with the more moral and faithful Lucy throughout, sees her past swallowed in the "gulf of time" (p. 433); whereas with Miles and Lucy the past, with thoughts of their parents and their childhood, is ever present.

The ci-devant Emily was no more than a summary of the feelings, interests, and passions of millions, living and dying in a narrow circle erected by her own vanities, and embellished by her own contracted notions of what is the end and aim of human existence, and within a sphere that she fancied respectable and refined.

As for the race of the Clawbonnys, all the elderly members of this extensive family lived and died in my service, or it might be better to say, I lived in theirs. (p. 433)

The sharp moral contrast between the characters is Cooper's primary technique throughout the novel to express his approval and disapproval of both the individuals and the world views they hold.

We know almost before we are told that Miles has a lovely son and daughter, not just one, but two of each, and with Lucy's becoming a grandmother we have change within a tradition. Miles Junior, little Grace, and little Lucy return us to the opening scene of the novel and the innocent and glorious childhood flourishing within the rural loveliness of Clawbonney. Miles discourses, in fact, on the necessary inevitability of change, but he warns against radical change. He sees danger in reverence for absolute progress, and he worries over the spirit in

his country that "there always must be more and more change . . . " (p. 436). We see Miles's education reaching its conclusion when he recognizes the danger of absolutes and sees that "truth is always on an eminence." Such a sentiment and moral is distinctly late Cooper. The truth Miles himself seems finally to have reached is suggested by the aphorisms he now utters: "'there are two principles that govern men's conduct as regards their associations; the one proceeding from humility and Christian forgiveness, and the other from indifference to what is right'" (p. 438). These are the dominant values of the late sea novels.

We are reminded of the central and pivotal incident of Afloat and Ashore, the Smudge episode, at the end when Miles names his new ship, which Marble captains, the Smudge. Both Miles and Marble seem to regard this recognition as atonement for their participation in this disgraceful event. In fact, Marble indicates that he has finally learned, partly from Miles's example, certain Christian values: "'I now see that it is more like a kind nature' to pardon, then to revenge'" (p. 441). To Miles's relief and joy, Marble has come to know God and to feel "the sublime beauty of the Christian morality" (p. 441). Now at the end of his life, Marble feels saved; yet he notes, "'There's that bloody Smudge notwithstanding'" (p. 441).

But the near-divine Lucy is able to show Marble how to lay his guilt over Smudge on "the love of Christ" (p. 448).

With Marble on his deathbed aboard the Smudge, being administered to by Miles and his whole family, Cooper uses this convenient opportunity to highlight the novel's central, moralistic theme. The angelic Lucy tries to lead Marble to "see" his "relation to the Creator of the Son, the savior of men" (p. 442). That Marble, after seventy rough seaman's years is finally in some measure saved gives great relief to all present. Marble actually sums up two major threads of the novel by revealing that "I now understand there is a divine direction of all our fortunes, whether ashore or afloat, black or white" (p. 444). So although we have seen one type of society, morality, and behavior afloat and another ashore during the story, Cooper now assures us at the end that God's grace and laws extend to both. One should note too that this total conversion is not so pat as in the other novels' carefully manufactured conclusions. While we might yet feel that Marble would be more realistic had the conversion not been so complete and joyous, still, Miles's earlier surviving his dark night of the soul and the major thrust of the narrative building toward this resolution make it more palatable and organic.

In summing up the fate of the characters, Miles includes a portrait of his children; and it is here that the existence of a meaningful tradition is made the most specific. Similarly, the Eden that the novel opens with and that both Miles and Lucy reflect on throughout and which seems to most concerned forever lost, both figuratively in their maturity and literally with Miles's temporary financial disaster, is now recaptured and re-perpetuated with Miles Jr. and the two girls. The circle of life is complete. The harmony and wholeness of existence have all returned, and we are reassured of a pattern and plan in the cosmos. Change is thus shown to be only a necessary transition and capable of being redeemed.

With this joyous ending it is difficult to understand the argument that Cooper is in Afloat and Ashore showing his great concern over appearance and reality, whimsy and change, violent unexpected deaths, and the like. While some of these themes clearly are present in the novel, they simply are evidence of the multiplicity of life. We must approach sadness and death as altogether "normal" in a novel as realistic as this one. As Marble makes clear at his end, in God's world, for the faithful, all things ultimately happen for the best, according to God's plan. The unfortunate, regrettable events of life are overcome, the world's orderliness and spiritual meaning are revealed. Marble is convinced at the end of "providential luck."

Miles recalls how his early years of marriage were ones of bliss and that his later ones were even more blissful. The circles and cycles that Lucy and Miles's lives represent are explicit in Miles's general overview of their past:

As I ride over the fields of Clawbonny, even at this day, I recall with tranquil delight, and I trust with humble gratitude, the manner in which those blessed early years of our marriage passed. That was the period when every thought of mine was truly shared by Lucy. . . . After passing the first summer which succeeded our marriage in this manner /building on and improving Clawbonny⁷, I told Lucy it was time to stop building and improving my own place, in order that some attention might be bestowed on that she had inherited from Mrs. Bradfort, and which was also old family property.

"Do not think of it, Miles," she said. "Keep Riversedge in good order, and no more. Rupert," who was then living, and in possession, "will see that nothing goes to waste; but Clawbonny, dear Clawbonny, is the true home of a Wallingford--you will remember. Should this precious boy of ours live to become a man, and marry, the old Westchester property can be used by him, until we are ready to give him up possession here."

This plan has not been literally carried out; for Miles, my eldest son, lives with us at Clawbonny in the summer; and his noisy boys are at this moment playing a game of ball in a field that has been expressly devoted to the amusements.

The period which succeeded the first half dozen years of my union with Lucy, was not less happy than the first had been;

though it assumed a new character. Our children then came into the account, not as mere playthings, and little beings to be most tenderly loved and cared for, but as creatures that possessed the image of God in their soul, and whose future characters, in a measure, depended on our instruction. The manner in which Lucy governed her children, and led them by gentle means to virtue and truth, has always been a subject of the deepest admiration and gratitude with me. Her rule has been truly one of love.
(pp. 450-451)

Cooper wants us to respond to this almost otherworldly happiness and completeness as being real and possible. We sense that the bliss and wholeness are rewards for their lives. What Miles emphasizes about his children is their future education, especially morally and religiously, just as this novel has focused on his education. So Cooper uses the children to stress the importance of his story, the illustration of the need for attention to the soul and for spiritual education, even though it come not on Sunday in church but on the high seas or in the backwoods-- wherever man is.

Miles digresses in the last pages on nationalistic matters by agreeing that "America is the greatest country of ancient and modern time, but . . . the intellectual existence of every American who goes to Europe is more than doubled in its intensity. . . . It is this want of the present and the past which causes the American, the moment he becomes speculative, to run into the future.

That future promises much, and, in a degree, may justify the weakness. Let us take heed, however, that it does not lead to disappointment" (p. 452). These strike me as very prophetic and profound words when one compares Emersons's pronouncements as the herald for the party of hope. In his more moralistic and traditional posture, Cooper is less optimistic about the ultimate goodness in man's soul and the destiny of the world, especially of America. But this attitude should not be confused with pessimism or the cankers of crabbed age: indeed, to many, Cooper, through Miles here, would seem the supreme realist and pragmatist. This digression by Miles is functional in as much as it reflects Cooper's and the book's concern with displaying the necessity of tradition, the strength and stability to be drawn from it and from such places as the Clawbonny estate, or Cooper's own in Oswego. In this sense, then, the sea milieu in Afloat and Ashore serves as an antithesis for the land stability. Further, as Marble the self-castaway discovers, man needs social intercourse, more than a ship at sea offers. In one sense Cooper is showing us the real limits of nautical life, though clearly his novelistic purposes are to show the spiritual and communal needs for all men, for he also knew that more than just seafaring men are isolatos and gods unto themselves. Miles has come to understand these

matters in his education, but he knows that not everyone has. God, family, and home--with these man redeems time by relating it to eternal. These matters represent, in a fashion, still-points amid the flux of existence, and no where else compares with the sea in demonstrating this flux. After all, is not that why Heraclitus used the running stream image in his famous illustration of the fluidity of existence?

Also in the last pages of this novel Cooper takes one last swipe at Puritanism. But his attack is ironic when we consider the dark side of Cooper some readers see in these late novels. Miles remarks that his family's religion "has no taint of puritanism"; it is one in which "sin and innocent gayety are never confounded" (p. 453). We should note too that Cooper is not proselytizing in these religious digressions and debates. What he does instead, and this is clearer in both Wing-and-Wing and The Sea Lions than it is in Afloat and Ashore, is to argue that a religious disposition and orientation in life is both desirable and essential to a full and satisfying existence. Only by letting go of his mortal pride and prejudice and selfishness in favor of piety and humility can man fulfill his purpose in life, which for Cooper is unambiguously spiritual. This is also necessary if he is to avoid the pitfalls of appearance and reality that he can put in his

own way, stupidly and blindly. To be able to see the reality of God's presence suffusing all life, one must clear one's eyes of blinding pride and prejudice. Through his own ordeal aboard the Dawn, and through the influence of Grace and Lucy, Miles has been able to do this, and his tale ends, therefore, with peace, tranquility, and happiness.

One hesitates timidly to assert that Afloat and Ashore deserves a reputation comparable to that of the best Leatherstocking novels. For most readers of Cooper, Natty's tales are the inviolate pinnacle of the author's oeuvre. But even though Miles's story is approximately twice the length of any of these, his exploits and life are as interesting and readable as any of Natty's adventures. The themes are as complex and their dramatization as credible, as are the characters themselves. But an evaluation of this sea novel is the highest when one notes its nautical milieu and compares it to all of the sea novels preceding it. They all fade in significance, and even our praise for The Two Admirals must be tempored by this new touchstone. Miles's story is not perfectly told, but one senses that behind him is to be found a creator with concerns and visions well beyond just mean prejudices; behind the finely detailed double setting, the rousing good action, and the fairly believable characters is a

writer struggling with the most complex questions of understanding reality as spiritual in a way alien to the stereotypes and caricatures of the early naval romances. Afloat and Ashore is an especially significant accomplishment for its author because it is a nautical novel. Here is, indeed, a significant and lasting contribution to the genre Cooper helped to create.

End-notes

65

Stephen Crane, "A Man Adrift on a Slim Spar,"
No. 113 of the Posthumously Published Poems.

66

Afloat and Ashore is the title of the first volume and Miles Wallingford the title of the second. Some mistakenly think that two novels are referred to with these two titles. Here is Cooper's explanation in a letter to his publisher, Richard Bentley: "When I got about half through with this book, I found I could not complete my subject, or work up the denouement, without dividing the book into two parts. I know you are averse to this mode of publishing, but I do not think it will be of much moment with this particular book. The second part will not be a sequel, but strictly a continuation of the story, the tale being of the double size. I have aimed at causing the interest to increase gradually, and I trust have succeeded as far as I have gone, which is some distance into the second part. There is more fidelity of portraiture of actual American life, apart from frontier scenes, in this book, than in any I have written." (Beard, Letters and Journals, IV, 455).

67

James Fenimore Cooper, Afloat and Ashore (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1956), p. 21. All references to Book I are to this edition. All references to Book II are to Miles Wallingford, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, n.d.

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James Beard recounts that as Cooper looked around him in the 1830s and 40s he found evidence everywhere of a "moral eclipse": "Cooper saw, with relentless moral realism, that American life was increasingly dominated by selfish, extralegal combinations more powerful in the aggregate than the government. . . . The remedy Cooper urged, as the only source of responsible values, was a return to 'original principles,' that is, to a general recognition of the claims of a universal moral law underlying American institutions and all human experience" (Letters and Journals, I, xxvii). Cooper comments frequently throughout his letters and journals on the cupidity and excessive greed of man, especially Americans. This theme will receive full treatment in The Sea Lions.

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Most of Cooper's critics emphasize this theme of duplicity, the complexities of appearance and reality. Donald Ringe says of the nature of reality exhibited in the novel: "The world is full of unseen dangers. . . . The appearance of things is as difficult to penetrate as it ever was, and the motives of men are fully as devious" (p. 106). George Dekker argues that Miles becomes aware of the "treacherous currents" (p. 212) of the sea. As we are seeing, however, if the currents are not dependable, these will merely be reflecting the motives of the men sailing on the waters. Objective reality is subverted by man, but it is not by itself capable of subverting.

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Many readers feel that Cooper is expressing with the Smudge episode a fictionalized analogue for the Somers mutiny affair. This case has been documented in Harrison Hayford (ed.), The Somers Mutiny Affair (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1959). It is fairly well known that Melville used the case as a source for Billy Budd, which is some indirect explanation for why we hear echoes of much of Melville's later work in Cooper. See also Beard, Letters and Journals, IV, 333 and following.

71

Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 107.

72

Philbrick, p. 140.

73

Philbrick, p. 142.

74

See George Dekker, James Fenimore Cooper, pp. 200-01. Dekker regards the novel as flawed primarily by being "aimless, digressive, and episodic. . . . Aristotle was right: you cannot achieve unity of action merely by reporting the diverse experiences of one man."

V. The Sea Lions: The Symbolic Sea Novel

"The ocean has many of the aspects of eternity, and often disposes mariners to regard their fellow-creatures with an expansiveness of feeling suited to their common situations. Its vastness reminds them of the time that has neither beginning nor end; its ceaseless movement, of the never-tiring impulses of human passions; and its accidents and dangers, of the Providence which protects all alike, and which alone prevents our being abandoned to the dominion of change."⁷⁵

It is artistically appropriate that The Sea Lions, Cooper's penultimate novel, was his last nautical tale. Two features make it a fitting climax to Cooper's development of the genre and to his maturation as a craftsman. First, The Sea Lions is a serious and profound study of man's soul, a searching and questioning after an ultimate truth: what is the nature of man? Is he essentially bestial, rapacious, and self-serving? Or, in a struggle between aspects of his will, can his finer, spiritual side win out? The novel presents such a struggle. Second, the plot Cooper uses to explore this theme is not only aptly chosen, it is also innovative and exciting. Two ships travel from New York to the South Pole in search of seals, sea lions, and sea elephants that exist in northern Antarctica in a kind of Edenic innocence on a mysterious and secretive island system. Also, the natural spectacle of this region is unlike that of any other on earth, or so at least Cooper presents it, and within this

otherworldly atmosphere go on various struggles between and within the souls of men.

Critical response to The Sea Lions is more split than to any other nautical tale. Alexander Cowie finds the narrative dull and inferior.⁷⁶ James Grossman argues that the novel has value as an adventure but that its religious content is "a minor but bulky excrescence" on the story.⁷⁷ Conversely, Charles Brady and Marius Bewley regard it as an unsuccessful and laborious Trinitarian Tract.⁷⁸

The Sea Lions is not without formidable supporters. The most famous, and earliest, praise is Herman Melville's in his review of the novel. While he is not blind to its flaws, Melville praises Cooper's handling of the Antarctic landscape: "Few descriptions of the lonely and the terrible, we imagine, can surpass the grandeur of the many scenes here depicted."⁷⁹ Similarly, Donald Ringe admits that Cooper tends to push his patently religious theme too hard, but he argues that the story has a broader, more general significance and that the setting and action are well suited to the theme Cooper wanted to present.⁸⁰ The most unqualified praise comes from Thomas Philbrick in his detailed analysis of The Sea Lions. Philbrick calls it Cooper's "most complex and yet fully integrated fiction."⁸¹ He believes that the story's stark realism has perhaps caused some readers to miss what is actually an allegory. Comparing the novel's alleogrical voyage to Coleridge's in

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Philbrick explains that 19th century writers regarded "Antarctica as the special province of symbolic fantasy," a place in which Cooper could examine "man's existence in a new and truer perspective."⁸² Echoing all the significant criticism of the novel, Philbrick focuses his analysis on the religious content, seeing the voyage as a questioning into the limits of man's reason that leads to a conversion as man comes to see the supreme ascendancy of God.

As this present study has progressed we have been consistently noting and trying to account for the movement in Cooper's nautical fiction from the early romantic tales of adventure to the realistic later works. Or, in other terms, there is a progression away from the story as romance to the story as novel. With The Sea Lions we have a solid link between Cooper and the highwater mark of the American Renaissance, Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne, in that it is symbolic and, in ways, allegorical. The Sea Lions continues Cooper's mature concern to treat moralistic and religious issues, and it demonstrates his desire to focus on nature to the extent that the Leatherstocking tales do. Cooper here is the landscape painter in the tradition of the Hudson River school, which marks a new dimension for the sea story.⁸³ At the time Cooper was writing The Sea Lions he wrote a letter praising "The Course of Empire" by Thomas Cole in which he made a remark that could certainly

be applied to his depiction of nature in this novel: "Nature should be the substratum of all that is poetical. But the superstructure ought to be no servile copy. The poet and the painter are permitted to give the beau ideal of this nature, and he who makes it the most attractive, while he maintains the best likeness, is the highest artist."⁸⁴ By trying to render nature accurately yet poetically in The Sea Lions, Cooper must necessarily curtail the number of gratuitous remarks meant to portray the jargon of sailors, the old tars like Coffin, which is tedious. The early superficial contrasts between sea and land disappear too, since nature is nature, afloat or ashore. Indeed the unity and harmony of all creation is a major theme in the last sea novels. Cooper's concentration on nature is in the presentation of nature as spiritual, or a spiritual manifestation. Miles Wallingford is aided in his spiritual experience by the news of God he receives on a sinking ship at mid-ocean as he views the sublime panorama of endless sea and sky. In this next novel, however, more elements of the natural world, to include clouds, seals, mists, mountains, and sea life, take on a special significance which also help to expand the limits and resources which the nautical novel offers to the writer.

In this his final contribution to the genre, Cooper examines the universal struggle between good and evil that he sees smoldering within man. One important technique

that he employs to render this dramatic conflict is his complex and sophisticated use of the Doppelganger theme. This is, in my opinion, the central symbolic device he uses to split man into his essential parts, that is, into spiritual and non-spiritual, body and soul; and we are reminded of Poe's William Wilson and of Hawthorne's Chillingworth and Dimsdale, characters who represent opposite motivations and impulses that are to be found in all men, the bestial struggling with the spiritual, evil struggling with good. Cooper does not argue for the integration of the personality, nor the need for man to come to grips with the grosser aspects of his being. Rather Cooper's sole concern is that man recognize the absolute ascendancy of his spiritual dimension which will lead to the death of pride and the birth of humility, the giving way of reason to faith--this is the process that Cooper dramatizes in The Sea Lions. The climax of the novel depicts the symbolic death of one kind of life and the birth of another.

The novel opens in the autumn of 1819. The scene is Oyster Pond Point, New York, where a ship owned by a Deacon Pratt lies at anchor waiting to go "outside." With a polemical tone Cooper informs us that Pratt is that regrettable kind of Deacon, a "grasping and mercenary" sinner. His consuming greed is balanced from the first by his niece and charge, Mary, who is the essence of selflessness. This melodramatic splitting of characters into good

and evil seems less gratuitous in The Sea Lions because it contributes to an atmosphere appropriate to the story's central conflict. Also, opening the novel with a portrait of Deacon Pratt suggests Cooper's bitter mood, for he begins with a discourse on America's mediocrity. In America "excellence in nothing is justly appreciated, nor is it often recognized" (p. 11). Cooper intends for his story to purge and uplift the body politic: his purpose is, in part, "to restore the public mind to a healthful state" (p. 11). He picks up a dominant theme of Afloat and Ashore by bemoaning the wholesale changes in habits and customs wherein the present consistently seems less vital and real. He clearly yearns, socially and culturally, for some stability and lastingness. His story will take this uncertainty and change and translate it into a religious flux in which man must seek out the unchanging.

This is a general dilemma that kept plaguing Cooper the man and that therefore keeps finding its way into his stories. In a letter to James Kirke Paulding in 1846, Cooper wrote that if he were fifteen years younger he would go abroad and never return.⁸⁵ Cooper shows himself in the mainstream of nineteenth-and-twentieth-century American writers as he sadly records the disappearance of "rural virtues" due to "the intrusion of what are termed improvements." The railroad, for instance, Cooper attacks as "a sort of bastard elegance, a pretension . . . prying

into the mysteries" of the regions it traverses (p. 16). This machine is the new serpent that science has put into the garden of the new world. With their confidence in man's reason at a peak, the scientists with the train treated God's creation with rude, disrespectful hands.⁸⁶

Deacon Pratt has recently befriended a down-and-out old seaman, Tom Dagget. No one knows, though all suspect, that the Deacon, who normally extends kindness to no one unless there is a certain profit, is responding to his thirst for riches. We later discover that Dagget has maps showing the location of buried treasure in some West Indies islands and the location of an island system in northern Antarctica where the seals live peacefully and unsuspectingly in incredible numbers. Pratt uses all his wiles to extract from the rapidly weakening Dagget all the details of the places marked on the maps as he outfits a ship, the one lying at anchor, that he intends to send on a lucrative voyage. The Deacon plans for Roswell Gardiner to captain the ship. Gardiner is basically a good man who is deeply in love with Mary. Whereas the Deacon represents merely the appearance of devoutness, Mary is the essence of devoutness; she is a "profoundly pious" child of God. So deep is Mary's faith that the seemingly perfect match of Mary and Roswell is blocked, as it was for Ghita and Raoul in Wing-and-Wing: "That cloud came from a species of infidelity that is getting to be so widely spread in

America as no longer to work in secret, but which lifts its head boldly among us. . . . Mary had reason to think that Roswell Gardiner denied the divinity of Christ" (p. 32).

Soon Thomas Dagget dies and the Deacon is able to uncover in the man's meager belongings the information he has been seeking. He immediately orders Gardiner to stock the ship and sail. Pratt's greed will tolerate no delay. But in the meantime a relative of the dead seaman, who is also named Dagget and is from Martha's Vineyard, arrives inquiring about the dead man. He is able to ascertain that Pratt has gained special knowledge, and so he returns to the Vineyard and quickly rigs a ship to accompany "The Sea Lion" of Oyster Pond Point.

The two ships are identical in appearance, they have similar crews, and their captains represent antithetical moral impulses in man. Dagget, like Pratt, is evil, greedy, covetous, and mean-spirited. He is man as only self, in whom the divine spark has been suffocated by egotism. The gratification of his baser appetites is his sole reason for being. Compared to Dagget and Pratt, the villains of most of the earlier novels seem almost comical. These two, Cooper emphasizes, are dangerously evil; they are a threat to the family of man and blots on God's kingdom.

As the identical ships, voyages, and general intentions indicate, Dagget is Gardiner's double. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say he is a shadow of Gardiner's amoral and irreligious instincts, a projection of what tempts man to elevate his grosser parts until he is over confident and believes himself self-sufficient. The plot of The Sea Lions involves their simultaneous figure-shadow trip to the South Pole for the seals. Although their motives are different in one respect--Dagget goes on this expedition only for himself, while Gardiner is just working for Pratt and is thus not moved only by personal greed--in both crews we discern the rapacious impulse to do all but sink their ships with plunder that is reminiscent of those questionable moral qualities exhibited by the Americans in the Smudge episode of Afloat and Ashore.

Roswell Gardiner's exact function in the novel is not just to be a foil for Dagget. The novel's focus is on his spiritual life and his ultimate conversion. In the beginning he suffers from Raoul Yvard's slavish devotion to reason and is unable to embrace that which man's limited and fallible senses cannot verify or report. In his preface to this novel, Cooper names the "pride of reason" as "one of the most insinuating of our foibles." He wants Roswell Gardiner to come to see that "something that we cannot comprehend lies at the root of every distinct

division of natural phenomena" (p. 7). The serious urgency of Cooper's theme is revealed in the opening paragraph of the novel's preface:

If any thing connected with the hardness of the human heart could surprise us, it surely would be the indifference with which men live on, engrossed by their worldly objects, amid the sublime natural phenomena that so eloquently and unceasingly speak to their imaginations, affections, and judgments. So completely is the existence of the individual concentrated in self, and so regardless does he get to be of all without that contracted circle that it does not probably happen to one man in ten that his thoughts are drawn aside from this intense study of his own immediate wants, wishes, and plans, even once in the twenty-four hours, to contemplate the majesty, mercy, truth, and justice, of the Divine Being that has set him, as an atom, amid the myriads of the hosts of heaven and earth. (p. 5)

Cooper obviously takes no chances his theme will be missed.

We first suspect a symbolic plot with Thomas Dagget's story of his knowledge of the seal rookery and the buried gold. Dagget had been the only survivor of a ship that once visited the island, and apparently he has the only extant copies of the necessary navigational charts. The implication of this sole survivor who is now near death without ever being able to collect on either fortune is that such is the price one must pay. The moral implied is that of Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale: Radix Malorum est Cupiditas. The wages of sin and greed are death. Deacon

Pratt's cupidity is aroused by the stories Dagget tells, so captivated by the "love of Mammon" (p. 56) is he. That Dagget has been a casualty of his immoral intentions is explicit when the Deacon meditates on his corpse:

There it lay, a senseless shell, deserted by its immortal tenant, and totally unconscious of that subject which had so lately and so intensely interested them both. It appeared as if the ghastly countenance expressed its sense of the utter worthlessness of all earthly schemes of wealth and happiness. Eternity seemed stamped upon the pinched and sunken features; not eternity in the sense of imperishable matter, but in the sense of the fate of man. Had all the gold of the Indies laid within his reach, the arm of Dagget was now powerless to touch it. (p. 58)

This emblem of death and the hopeless vanity of mortal concerns shows how much man becomes an object of ridicule unless he is redeemed religiously. Without religious devotion, how is he to transcend his finite world? The Deacon is only superficially moved by this vision, however, for, being a Puritan, Cooper specifically argues, the Deacon is concerned foremost with appearances, and in his life they have been "made to take the place of reality" (p. 59). It is not the unreliable appearance of the world that undoes man, but man himself. The lesson of Dagget's corpse is obvious to anyone open to the news of God.

As in the two sea novels preceding The Sea Lions, Cooper intends here for his characters to penetrate the

facade of their own behavior and that of their fellows so as to perceive the spirituality lying at the heart of all existence. The covetousness of Deacon Pratt is a moral and spiritual blindness that must be purged or punished if man is to thrive, and it is the protagonist's test of faith and struggle with his lack of absolute faith that these last three novels have dealt with. Even in The Sea Lions, with its explicit conflict between appearance and reality, Cooper's polemical intention is not to attempt to reform society but the individual through his spiritual trial and individual ordeal.

Witnessing the mean and selfish spirit of the Deacon may tempt us to sympathize with the argument that the mature Cooper was something of a misanthrope; yet we still have the pious Mary counterpointed with her uncle, with Roswell somewhere in between. In one sense, therefore, this novel presents Roswell's existence and vacillation between the moral antipodes represented by Mary and the Deacon. One is the spirit, the other the flesh, just as at sea one of Gardiner's mates, Steven Stimson, will take Mary's place in this scheme, and Dagget will supplant the Deacon. Mary's position is most fully delineated in her last interview with Gardiner before the voyage. "'You worship your reason, instead of the only true and living God. This is idolatry of the worst character, since the idol is never seen by the devotee, and he does not know of

its existence'" (p. 118). Mary argues that man's reason cannot help him in understanding such matters as the fall, redemption, and salvation: "'We are to believe in, and not to reason on revelation'" (p. 118). Gardiner cannot grasp that Mary's faith depends upon her not being able to "understand" why God would allow his Son to be crucified; his mind cannot fathom the significance of mystery.

This explicit theological discourse and proselytizing goes on for several pages, and later, during the voyage, Gardiner's religious education will be continued by Stimson. Such passages explain why The Sea Lions has many detractors. Even if we were not in an age of uncertainty and doubt, we would object to this explicit moralizing and philosophizing in a work of fiction. Cooper simply could not control his impulse to improve and convert his audience. And no one, to my knowledge, applauds this intrusion by Cooper of his own beliefs in such a heavyhanded way, no matter that they are heart-felt and worthy ideas and principles. And one has only to consult his letters to discover how close to Mary's were Cooper's own beliefs.⁸⁷ But it is a mistake to reject the novel because of this flaw, even though it is a pervasive one. What we should examine instead is the way Cooper uses the symbolic voyage and the doppleganger theme to reinforce and support the specific theme he regrettably will not allow the symbolic elements to set forth without such explicit didacticism.

On the first day out on the sea, Gardiner for the first time sights "a schooner of about our tonnage and under precisely our canvas" (p. 127). They steer in its direction for a closer look: "In size, there was no apparent difference between the vessels, and there was a somewhat remarkable resemblance in the details" (p. 129). Its name is the "Sea Lion" of Martha's Vineyard, or "The Sea Lion II," captained by Jason Dagget, and the ship is on precisely the same mission as the "Sea Lion I." These explicit comparisons should not be lost on the reader. By making the vessels shadows of one another, Cooper is pointing out the similar relationship of the captains. But it is not accurate to say that Dagget and Gardiner are as identical as the ships, only that there is an extraordinary relationship. This is all we know for now. Dagget claims he created a twin because he so much admired Gardiner's vessel. We see in this relation another Benito Cereno deception, for Dagget's ship is not what it seems, not in purpose or past. Gardiner, at this point deaf and dumb to the moral and religious dimension of all creation, is not inclined to make "moral inferences, from ordinary events" (p. 133). He can only manage a vague suspicion even though it was uncommon to find two vessels "so molded, stowed, sparred, and handled, that their rate of sailing should be nearly identical" (p. 134). This is foreshadowing, of course.

The voyage to the South Pole is covered fairly rapidly, as only two episodes are related along the way. One involves a brief halt to hunt whales. The two ships both participate in this venture, though not in harmony. At first the hunt seems merely a digressive adventure with no particular significance, the sort of stalling and cluttering we see in so many of Cooper's novels. But as the hunt concludes, both Dagget and Gardiner harpoon different whales at about the same instant. The chase, however, brings the two on a collision course. The lines become entangled as one whale escapes and the two captains end up standing on and claiming the same whale. Thus Cooper uses this episode not just so many pages of story but literally to link these two characters together to further their identification as doubles. And it has a second function. Because Dagget does not know the precise location of the seal rookery, he attempts to attach himself to Gardiner. He constantly proposes a partnership, as he now does, a consort relationship between the two, and since Gardiner resists this proposal, Dagget thus becomes a burden for him, a trial of sorts, not unlike the Ancient Mariner's albatross. Gardiner writes home to Mary expressing his agitation over trying to rid himself of Dagget and being unable to, just as a man might want to escape or suppress his less laudatory instincts but not being able to. Gardiner in fact may want to kill his double but cannot. He frequently

calculates an escape from Dagget and finally brings this off in the second episode of the voyage, a brief stop at the turbulent Cape Horn. In the mists and fogs of this region Gardiner finally shakes "off his leech" (p. 206).

Dagget represents a corruption of the soul in his greed and selfishness. While Gardiner is from the first a much better man, he lacks the moral and spiritual intergration that would allow him to deal with his double. The Sea Lions suggests in its climactic voyage and in the presentation of the Antarctic region that a certain climate and backdrop is necessary for the spiritual regeneration and integration of Gardiner. When the "Sea Lion I" reaches the islands at South America's tip there is a complex solitude, desolation, yet sublimity about the place. The men express awe at the glory of creation they are brought to witness: In the midst of the turbulent eddies and tides, "no man spoke, for each person felt that the crisis was one in which silence was a sort of homage to the deity" (p. 209). They anchor here so that Gardiner and Stimson may ascend a pyramid-shaped rock that marks the cape. This action begins a motif, for several more times these two will climb mountains together, and each time Gardiner's spiritual advisor afloat uses the occasion to advance the captain's spiritual progress. Just as Gardiner vacillated between the influence of Mary and the Deacon at

Oyster Pond Point, now he occupies a similarly symbolic place between Dagget and Stimson. One tries to pull him down to perdition; the other, as the mountain climbing suggests, attempts to lift his heart heavenward. It is the part of Gardiner represented by Dagget, the corrupt and mortal part of man, that must be purged, destroyed, or converted so that the noncorporal spirit can live and be nourished.

From the rock Gardiner and Stimson can see the Pacific to the right, the Antarctic to the face, and the Atlantic to the left, and in the presence of snow, rain, mists, and clouds, Cooper brings the plenitude and power of creation to bear on the conscious minds of these two voyagers. Before them lies "the mysterious depths of the antarctic circle. . . . to the southward of the Horn itself, all seemed a waste" (p. 217). The antarctic ocean appears a "great void" with its "dark and menacing" weather. Such a symbolically charged atmosphere suggests why Conrad held Cooper in such high esteem, for these passages are certainly reminiscent of much of Conrad's symbolic nautical tales:

For James Fenimore Cooper nature was not the framework, it was an essential part of existence. He could hear its voice, he could understand its silence, and he could interpret both for us in his prose with all that felicity and sureness of effect that belong to a poetical conception alone.⁸⁸

At this point in the narrative, the "Sea Lion" of Oyster Point has eluded its twin, but no sooner does it do so than Gardiner begins to feel uneasy, as if he were somehow now incomplete and on his own, especially as the ship probes deeper into unknown regions. We feel almost as if man here is entering a forbidden or perhaps a sacred region⁸⁹: "To the southward a cold mistiness veiled the view, and every mile the schooner advanced appeared like penetrating deeper and deeper into regions that nature had hitherto withheld from the investigation of the mariner" (pp. 218-19). But as the mists clear, the scene reveals much more than just the foreboding. Ice bergs are everywhere; some seem quite black, others "were gorgeous in their gleams of emerald and gold" (p. 222). With the various aquatic birds and sea creatures Cooper creates a "picture of animated nature" (p. 222). Interestingly, Gardiner often mistakes the bergs for mountains. "The glorious Alps themselves, those wonders of the earth, could scarcely compete in scenery with the views that nature lavished, in that remote sea, on a seeming void. But the might and horror of God were there, as well as beneath the equator" (p. 225). We are clearly travelling to a special place, one unique in the world where we may reasonably anticipate a grand drama; surely some significant action will transpire. And Cooper uses these lavish descriptions to do more than simply animate nature. The

scene so far has been splendid, but with mountain-like bergs floating, with the mists and fogs, and with the constantly changing colors, there is deception and uncertainty here, as one without faith, lacking the rock of God, might be afflicted with. Suddenly the top of a real mountain comes into view: "A rock that is nearly perpendicular, rising out of the ocean for a thousand feet, is ever imposing and grand. This was rendered so much the more so by its loneliness, its stable and stem position amid floating and moving mountains of ice, its brown sides and bald summit, the latter then recently whitened with a fall of pure snow, and its frowning and fixed aspect amid a scene that might otherwise be said to be ever in motion" (p. 222). Here is an objectification of what Gardiner has come to find, whether he yet knows it or not. Here is the power, the magnificence, and the certainty of God. Now the whole scene represents the multitude and complexity of life held suddenly in a newly ordered perspective, like the famous jar in Wallace Steven's poem, though here not a thing of man, but a thing of God causes the new order. Perhaps the best interpretation of this scene is Cooper's own of a similar rock in the series of paintings by Thomas Cole, "The Course of Empire," to which I referred earlier: "There is a sublimity about the rock on the mountain top, seen in its different aspects, but always the same, a

monument of its divine origin, amid all the changes of the scene, that has always deeply affected me."⁹⁰

Once again, Gardiner and Stimson ascend the precipice. Gardiner's specific religious beliefs--he is not without faith--seem to be Deistic, and Cooper fully intends Gardiner to seem to be a perfectly upright, respectable fellow. James Grossman quibbles that Gardiner is not a bad sort, is not an infidel, and that Cooper's using him as the converttee, therefore, is faulty.⁹¹ But as Mary's absolutism indicates, Cooper wishes to convince us that an enormous gap exists between an ordinary good man like Gardiner, and true children of God such as Stimson or Mary, for Gardiner trusts to his reason and denies Christ's divinity. For instance, Gardiner thinks little of recognizing the Sabbath here in this otherworldly place: "Pride of reason rendered him jealous of everything like a concession to the faith of those who believe in the Son of God" (p. 240). Yet in this setting there are hopeful stirrings in Roswell's soul. He continues almost daily readings in the Bible Mary sent with him, and at one point he seeks out Stimson, who usually seems constantly at his shoulder, and for a third time they assault the "summit of the sterile rocks." With each ascension Gardiner is able to gain a better perspective from which he can better understand his place in the scheme of things. His ability to see so much and so far from the mountain top reveals by

contrast how little he can perceive on ground level. And so it is with faith, Cooper implies. Without a spiritual vision man misses most of what there is in the world worth seeing. Gardiner's ordeal here will make him aware of how blind he has been.

While on the mountain on this occasion they sight the other "Sea Lion" a short way off, almost ice-locked. They immediately set off to warn Dagget of his immediate peril, but the other captain is at first unresponsive to their entreaties, so corrupted is he by his devotion to the "root of all evil": "Even then, with his vessel literally shelved on the ice, certain that she had been violently nipped, he was congratulating himself on reaching a sealing-ground, from which he could never return without encountering all the dangers over again" (p. 259). The blinder Dagget becomes to his actual predicament here, the more conscious Gardiner grows. As one weakens, the other strengthens. This relationship is mirrored in numerous ways. Physically it is true: Dagget later breaks his leg, while Gardiner remains healthy. Gardiner's sealing camp is well organized and maintained; Dagget's is slipshod and random. The crew of "Sea Lion I" have taken the innocent and unsuspecting seals carefully and quietly; the other crew, and especially its captain, are reckless in their haste to equal the other group's catch.

After a month of hunting, Gardiner's ship is full. But Dagget convinces him to remain and help him fill his, even though there are various warning signs that they need to soon depart or risk being icebound for the winter. Dagget argues that they throw off all restraints, that is, that they should make a mad rush to collect as many seals as possible and take the chance of the seals departing; and he also wants to cease keeping the Sabbath, a habit that Stimson has been responsible for maintaining. On the one hand, Gardiner more and more marvels over the grandeur, sublimity, and beauty of this wild scene. He is beginning to respond to the spirituality suffused in this natural setting. Dagget, however, is affected in quite another way: "'Tis a remarkable spot, as no one can deny . . . but I like its abundance of seal the most of all. I cannot say I have much taste for sights, unless they bring the promise of good profits with them'" (p. 272). So, to what Cooper obviously means as the significance of this place, Dagget feels nothing, he can feel nothing. As the narrator specifically says, "The lust of gold was strong within him; and while that has full dominion over the heart, it is vain to expect that any purely spiritual fruits will ripen there" (p. 273). The contrast between the two captains is clear since we witness as we read of this voyage the ripening of the fruits within Gardiner. Given the sterile, frigid climate, Cooper's use of the

image of the fruit ripening continues the theme of the paradox of faith and the paradox of nature too. As we will later discover, much can grow in this inhospitable place if one is warmed adequately by God.

While Dagget figures profits, Gardiner's thoughts turn to Mary and her "excessive" faith. It is credible that Gardiner should be mulling over the religious matters with which his mind is more and more preoccupied. But we have in these meditations the painful excess of Cooper's handling of his theme. The strongly developed contrast between the three principals of the voyage has clearly shown the split between Gardiner and his double, and Gardiner's superiority is as obvious as Dagget's deprivation of spirit. But Cooper will not allow his images and symbols to carry his ideas. The narrator must put on the mask of the prosaic Stimson and have the last word: Gardiner's religious thoughts "converted the extraordinary view that lay before his sight into a vast, magnificent, gorgeous, though wild temple, for his worship and honor. It might be well for all of us occasionally to pause in our eager pursuit of worldly objects, and look around at the world itself, considering it as but a particle in the illimitable fields of creation. . . . brief but vivid glances at the immensity of the moral space which separates man from his Deity, have very healthful effects in inculcating that humility which is the stepping-stone of faith and love" (pp. 274-75).

This long scene between the three men takes place on top of the mountain, where most of the spiritual insights have occurred, and as they start down Dagget falls, almost perishes in the snow, is only at the last moment saved by Gardiner, and breaks his leg. This begins the slow but certain disintegration of the non-spiritual aspect of Gardiner.

The wily and tempting Dagget uses his disadvantaged position again to convince Gardiner to remain, despite the forebodings of bad weather, and supervise the loading and filling of the "Sea Lion II." Gardiner succumbs, but Dagget's undisciplined crew refuse to follow orders and run amok, slaughtering the seals and upsetting the patterned and harmonious relationship earlier established. Yet both crews remain as the signs of summer steadily fade.

At last they load the ships and attempt escape through the numerous ice floes. This section of the novel finds Cooper at his best as he narrates rapid-paced action sequences of the ships finding only one cul-de-sac after another in the maze-like sea. In the midst of these dangerous maneuverings a foreshadowing of Gardiner's ultimate conversion occurs as he is moved by the "magnificence" of the pictures the ice makes to trust in Providence for once in his life, as it suddenly occurs to him that God did produce all things (p. 304).

Cooper interrupts the narrative here, as he does several times throughout the adventure, with interlude chapters set back home with Mary and the Deacon conversing on the likely fate of the expedition. It is interesting to note how closely Dagget's failing health and general decline is paralleled by the Deacon's. And the gold-lust they both share is the ultimate cause of their infirmities. Mary sees this greed in her uncle and mourns over his "blindness and worldiness." These chapters function primarily to lengthen the book, prolong the suspense concerning the fortunes of the vessels, and delay the climax. The one relevant function they have is the further pairing and grouping of characters which gives them much more reason for being than is common in Cooper who, having to meet length requirements, often pads his novels and thus flaws them.

Meanwhile at the South Pole, his ship crippled by the ice, Dagget once again appeals to Gardiner for succor. Symbolically Gardiner cannot leave himself. Indeed, he feels "chained" to Dagget's fate (333). Thus they are forced to return to their sealing grounds. But it hardly seems the same place as summer has given way to autumn. One sign of this change is the disappearance of the seals, which is also a sign that Gardiner properly interprets as ominous and as an expression of Divine disapproval. Their leaving is symbolic of Dagget's errors and an indication

that they are all being left to their fate. To Dagget, however, this portent means only decreased revenue, and this is the extent of his response. We have little hope for one so callous and unmoved by things around him, for one who is, like the Deacon, so blind.

The vessels return to the camp and begin at once to repair both crafts so as to make another and last attempt to escape the Antarctic winter. While Gardiner marvels at the intricacies of the universe that produce the different seasons, he more and more sees the "power and wisdom" behind and within nature and all the events of life. That is, his response and sensitivity to the spiritual element suffusing all life is being heightened. But he remains anxious about the coming weather and being "veiled in the freezing obscurity of its long and gloomy twilight if not absolute night" (p. 351). Such images cause us to anticipate the bitter winter that they will not escape, and to regard it as a kind of purgatorial experience, the last ordeal and test.

Despite their many laborious attempts to return home, all concerned are finally locked in by the massive floes. In fact Dagget's vessel is actually lifted out of the water and "shelved by the moving ice," which crucially damages his ship: "she was literally buried" by the ice. "All this had been done in ten minutes! Then it was that

the vast superiority of nature over the resources of man made itself apparent." The crews of both ships are thus made aware visually "of their own insignificance" (p. 361). But this unusual predicament of Dagget's ship illustrates more than man's finitude in conflict with nature. For all purposes, there now remains only one ship, just as we should now suspect that there can be only one surviving captain. All that Dagget and his vessel represent as shadows and doubles of Gardiner and his ship must perish, and this shelving is part of the process that began with Dagget's broken leg. The image of the ship's being buried in the ice implies a like fate for Dagget.

The extent of Dagget's cupidity and moral corruption is instanced when he still refuses to accept the obvious and inevitable course of action that they all must communally follow if they are to survive. He asks Gardiner to pump out the oil he has stored aboard the "Sea Lion I" so Dagget can put his seal skins on board, then this one ship can make a final escape attempt. Gardiner finally confronts Dagget with the obvious, that their predicament has been caused by Dagget's mania for more and more skins. But the unregenerate captain can simply reply: "'Skins, measure for measure, in the way of tonnage, will bring a great deal more than ile'" (p. 368). The corrupt dimension of man represented by Dagget, the mortal blindness, is clearly beyond hope and regeneration.

Cooper uses an interesting image motif to detail the situation the sealers are now in. Life is presented in terms of warmth and heat, and since the sun is constantly seen as God's light or beacon in an otherwise dark world, it takes on symbolic aspects of both the vital heat of life and spiritual warmth too. Cooper describes the mood as desolate, "devoid of hope. . . . It was midday, and it was freezing everywhere in the shade. A bright genial sun was shedding its glorious rays on the icy panorama" (p. 363). The immediate problem is providing fuel so that they can survive the months of bitterly cold winter ahead. Vital heat, essential to life, must be kept circulating "'until God's sun comes back in his course,'" as Stimson says (p. 375). We are reminded here of the analogous relationship involving Christ, whose divinity Gardiner cannot yet accept. Christ, that is, is man's hope and salvation in a dark and cold world, the bearer of spiritual warmth and nourishment. The only logical solution to their quandary is to use the damaged "Sea Lion II" for fuel. But Dagget and his crew will selfishly hear nothing of this idea, even though their ship is a wreck, much as man's body is a fragile and wrecked vessel that must be redeemed for eternal life. Most of the sealers from Martha's Vineyard, in fact, prefer to try to weather the winter in the wrecked ship despite the fact that this splitting of their efforts, supplies, and so forth, is the opposite of what

is required. Such is not only their lack of a common spirit, but the two loci of action now, the wreck and the hut of Gardiner and Stimson and their crew, polarizes the groups into a spiritual and non-spiritual arrangement, just as we have had various pairings with the five major characters, especially in the doppelganger relationship between Dagget and Gardiner. We can view the physical dichotomy of the two camps, then, as a dividing of man into body and soul, which is really what all the other similar splittings have suggested. That is, the plot and action of this novel are in many complex and intricate ways dramatic struggles between men of faith and men without, and between aspects of a single man's body and soul. Without attempting to decide how much of this architecture Cooper consciously intended, we can at the very least marvel at a surprising and welcome symbolic handling of plot and characters in a novel whose theme in ways demands just such a treatment.

The months pass slowly, and with really nothing to do, Gardiner and Stimson spend much of their time in plodding religious disputation which is all a part of Gardiner's development and integration, but it is tedious to read. Stimson asserts his belief in the divinity of Jesus, based not on what he had been taught: "'Faith tells me this; and Faith comes from God'" (p. 395). Gardiner yearns for this faith, but he worries he can never believe in what

appears an impossibility. "Then followed a long discussion, in which ingenuity, considerable command of language, human pride, and worldly sentiments, contended with the clear, intuitive, deep conviction which it is the pleasure of the Deity often to bestow on those who would otherwise seem to be unfitted to become the repositories of so great a gift" (pp. 395-96). And so it happens that Gardiner's spiritual growth in this sterile environment continues, and now it is rendered in terms of his separation from his double. They are now physically separated and ideologically at odds. With much snow and bitter cold, and with the temperature often fifty degrees below zero, a month passes without intercourse between the two parties. This has been a month in which Gardiner has lived with only his thoughts of Mary and with his Bible readings which together have led him to finally embrace humility: "Man is a very different being in high prosperity from what he becomes when the blows of an evil fortune, or the visitations of Divine Providence, alight upon him. The skepticism of Roswell was more the result of human pride, of confidence in himself, than of any precept derived from others, or of any deep reasoning process whatever" (p. 402). Gardiner's main flaw, his pride, is converted to humility which is what the symbolic weakening and disappearance of Dagget have been preparing us for. Gardiner is not yet fully converted, nor is his ordeal over, as the narrator

specifically informs us, but this change is a prelude. He clings to his position, that what faith asks seems to contradict his experience, but Stimson replies, "'We know little of a thousand things to set up our weak judgments in the very face of revelation'" (p. 405). From this point on Gardiner's mind is truly stimulated as "he thinks deeply and solitarily over these matters" (p. 407). It is less through his actually suffering than through the mystery and plenitude of nature that Gardiner is converted:

Each and all of these sublime emblems of the power of God were twinkling like bright torches glowing in space; and the mind had only to endow each with its probable or known dimensions, its conjectural and reasonable uses, to form a picture of the truest sublimity in which man is made to occupy his real position. In this world, where, in a certain sense, he is master; where all things are apparently under his influence, if not absolutely subject to his control; where little that is distinctly visible is to be met with that does seem to be created to meet his wants, or to be wholly at his disposal, one gets a mistaken and frequently a fatal notion of his true place in the scale of the beings who are intended to throng around the footstool of the Almighty. . . . All this Roswell was very capable of feeling, and in some measure of appreciating; and never before had he been made so conscious of his own insignificance, as he became while looking on the firmament that night, glowing with its bright worlds, and suns, doubtless the centres of other systems in which distance swallowed up the lesser orbs. (p. 408)

Cooper argues that man's knowledge and reason, because they give him self-confidence and thus pride, are major obstacles to his receiving news of God. Humility is

requisite for man's regeneration if he is ever to have faith in things unseen. Stimson is finally able to "convince" Roswell that an incomprehensible God is essential for the faith he feels. The backdrop and his predicament have impressed upon Gardiner a more acceptable awareness of "his real position in the scale of created beings. . . . In this frame of mind Roswell was made to see that Christianity admitted of no half-way belief; it was all true, or it was wholly false" (p. 411). Dagget's existence up to this point has been evidence of Roswell's "half-way-belief," as is Cooper's choice of Gardiner as his protagonist, that is a man who, except for his lack of faith, is otherwise good. And does not Cooper's choice in fact add to the book's realistic elements? Who would accept the complete conversion of Pratt or Dagget, men with souls so corrupted by greed that they are spiritually blind?

It seems hardly necessary to point out how appropriate was Cooper's choice of the Antarctic setting for this early part of the novel's religious climax. What better site for Gardiner to glimpse the physical and moral mysteries of creation that he cannot know on this, "the positively severest night of the whole season" (p. 412)? His dark night and conversion are at hand, and at this turning point the sealers hear a faint cry coming from the direction of the wreck. As Gardiner is now being born again into spiritual awareness and knowledge, we must expect Dagget to die.

Cooper again uses the heat image to suggest Gardiner's spiritual condition. When Stimson remarks that Gardiner is standing the bitter cold well, Roswell replies that "I do not feel the cold, . . . on the contrary, I'm in a pleasant glow" (p. 413). And when they arrive at the wreck in answer to the ominous cry and to attempt Dagget's rescue, Dagget, "the man of iron nerves and golden longings," the "grasping seeker after gain," now cares only for heat and coffee. The feet, legs, and forearms of the men are as rigid as icicles. Such is the unpleasant fate of those who spurn God's promise of spiritual comfort and warmth.

Earlier in the novel the Deacon remained pridefully and ignorantly unmoved by the first Dagget's corpse. But now as Roswell stands in the wreck confronting the suffering, the dead, and the uncertain outcome of the living, "his views of the past and the future became much lessened in confidence and hope. The majority and judgment of God assumed a higher place than common in his thoughts, while his estimate was fast getting to be humbled and searching" (p. 430). Suddenly he falls asleep, and when he awakens the wind is increasing, bringing rain and a thaw. The mountains of snow melt to form deluges. The signs of spring joyously multiply, bringing God's warmth and the promise of ultimate life, eternal renewal for those who will be born again. The survivors try to revive Dagget, but the circulation has been too long stopped so the vital

current will not return. This fate of the unbelievers is thus nicely contrasted with Gardiner's present state.

The doppelganger relationship between Dagget and Gardiner is discernable in this life/death interlacing. It is made explicit when the remaining sealers begin repairs on the "Sea Lion I." Before there had been two twin ships, just as there had been two pilots. With Dagget dead, Gardiner decides to use the upper parts of the second ship and graft these to the hull of his ship so as to form a single, unified and viable craft. This intricate symbolic coordination of characters and crafts is too infrequently appreciated by this novel's critics. I too wish Cooper had seen fit to cut down Stimson's role and to make Gardiner's conversion more implicit than explicit, but his failure to do this should not obstruct our seeing those aspects of the novel that demonstrate Cooper's mastery of the resources of fiction.

One of the encouraging developments to the men, and especially to Gardiner, who now is more able to discern morals and meanings in physical reality, is the returning of the seals: " . . . these animals no longer awakened cupidity in the breasts of the sailors" (p. 438). The seals, then, in their passive innocence seem proof of God's covenant and are reminiscent of the return of the albatross to the ancient mariner. While all of this is going on, Dagget dies; "the machine of clay stopped" (p. 443). He who had attached himself as a leech to

Roswell to corrupt and pervert his very soul, now lies bloodless. With his death "a lively admonition of the vanity of the world was administered. How little had he been able to foresee all that had happened, and how mistaken had been his own calculations and hopes! What, then, was that intellect of which he had been so proud, and what reason had he to rely on himself in those matters that lay equally beyond the cradle and the grave--that incomprehensible past, and the unforeseen future, towards which all those in existence were hastening! Roswell had received many lessons in humility, the most useful of all the lessons that man can receive in connection with the relation that really exists between the Deity and himself" (p. 443).

And so now Gardiner, through Dagget's and his own ordeal, through Mary and Stimson, and through his Bible readings has finally grasped the significance of humility and self-abasement. He has overcome man's natural tendency to worship, as Dagget has shown us, the most demoralizing of false ideals: ". . . that of self was perhaps the most objectionable" (p. 443). This theme of the novel works on both a religious and a secular level and suggests the values that most all of Cooper's late works dramatize. Cooper the reformer wanted most for man to recognize this corrupting tendency of his pride and reason. Raoul Yvard fails to and duly perishes; Miles Wallingford undergoes

conversion and not only survives but is rewarded several fold in a Job-like denouement. In The Sea Lions we have the faithless and the faithful combined in the twin captains, and again one perishes and one undergoes spiritual change, spiritual uplift, and, later, material reward.

Cooper forestalls the obvious conclusion of this novel by having a sudden cold snap afflict the sealing camp of the survivors. In fact, it is the ultimate test because, with the fuel now exhausted, the survivors must endure the coldest night of their experience: "Nothing the men had yet seen, or felt, equalled its chill horrors" (p. 445). Both inside and out, all is frozen still and white with the mass of frost. We are to take this unexpected return of winter as perhaps the darkest night of all their souls, a final threatening reminder of God's presence and power through nature. But the faithful survive, and the next morning the wind again shifts and the refreshing and renewing rains come. The sudden and expansive melting cleanses and purifies the area, much like Gardiner himself has been purified and renewed. The deluge, Cooper says, would cause Niagara "to hide her head in mortification. These sublime scenes are of frequent occurrence amid the solitudes of earth; the occasional phenomena of nature often surpassing in sublimity and beauty her rarest continued efforts"⁹² (p. 447). The streams and cataract symbolically wash away all the ice and every sign "of the

dead into the sea" (p. 447). The remains of the many seals and Dagget too, the former manifestation of Gardiner's temptation and selfish impulses, are swept away, out into the endless sea. "In a word, the rocks were as naked and as clean as if man's foot had never passed over them" (p. 448). This symbolic cleansing returns the special, far-away place to a prelapsarian innocence and purity, again, as has happened to Gardiner's heart in his rebirth. The place and people are gloriously born again, which Cooper means as an uplift and as evidence of hope eternal, God's promise of everlasting life. It is indeed curious that some readers emphasize Cooper's bitter mood in the presence of such a joyous finale. True, the society has been corrupt and man's soul has been shown wanting, in need of release from his painfully finite limits, but surely a pessimistic, despairing view would have Gardiner perishing and/or Dagget surviving, not the other way around.

A related theme that we have noted in the earlier novels reaches its climactic presentation in these concluding scenes. Roswell's conversion to humility and faith is accompanied by, or seen in the terms of, a change in physical perception and perspective. The image Cooper uses is sight, one's visual perception of the world, his fellows, and himself. Gardiner now sees what Miles saw and what Raoul could not; he sees behind and beyond what before had appeared only as random causes and effects. The "Sea Lion

I" painstakingly avoids various threats when it departs.

These escapes made a deep impression on Roswell. Until the past winter he had been accustomed to look upon things and events as matters of course. This vacant indifference, so common to men in prosperity, was extended even to the sublimest exhibition of the Almighty power; our hero seeing nothing in the firmament of heaven, of a clear night, but the twinkling lights that seemed to him to be placed there merely to garnish and illumine the darkness of this globe. Now, how differently did he look upon natural objects and their origin!" (p. 456)

Since he is now open to the news of God, he receives it. Recognizing the beautiful intricacy of creation as well as its being wedded to God is the spiritual climax of Gardiner's ordeal because it involves more than simply new and better ideas, stronger morals, and so forth. The sort of conversion Cooper wants his character to undergo involves a total change in orientation, a whole new perspective from which to view all things. And it is for this reason that Dagget's utter defeat and death are so important to augment the expression of Cooper's religious theme. That part of Gardiner made manifest in Dagget is not simply brought under control or subordinated; it is excised.

Many months later that which is now integrated, the reconstructed ship with its "whole" captain, returns to Oyster Pond Point. Interestingly, Mary at first does not recognize the ship, and of course she believes Gardiner dead. Thus she is made aware of his coming home "resurrected" and changed. Roswell returns to find the Deacon near

death. Like Dagget his last thoughts are only on the material result of the voyage. Cooper actually apologizes to his readers for the dreary pictures of human nature he must show with the Deacon's loathsome, covetous behavior that characterizes his shallow existence. Conversely, the glorious is present too; as Gardiner and Mary embrace he whispers to her his "humble submission to the faith which accepted Christ as the Son of God. . . . That moment was the happiest of her short and innocent life!" (p. 468). Cooper ends the novel with a long, emphatic reiteration of what it has all meant: Roswell never waived in his faith--from this first "just view of his own insignificance, as compared to the power of God. He then learned the first great lesson in religious belief, that of humility; without which no man can be truly penitent, or truly a Christian." He no longer judges the Deity with his "narrow faculties," nor does he set "up his blind conclusions, in the face of positive revelations. He saw that all must be accepted or none; and there was too much evidence, too much inherent truth, a morality too divine, to allow a mind like his to reject the gospel altogether. With Mary at his side, he has continued to worship the Trinity, accepting its mysteries in an humble reliance on the words of inspired men" (p. 490).

The Sea Lions stands in the same relation to Cooper's other nautical novels as does The Last of the Mohicans to

his Leatherstocking stories.⁹³ It contains those techniques that demonstrate a climax in his utilization of this new genre. Cooper uses the symbolic voyage, the spiritual landscape, the symbolic pairing of characters and vessels, and an exploration into the profoundest theme available to a writer. And despite Cooper's zealous excesses in character development, The Sea Lions represents the most exquisite wedding of form and content in any of his sea novels. Moreover, without sacrificing the verisimilitude Cooper so much wanted his sea stories to exude--the reality of ships and sailors, their actions, speech, and beliefs--he uses the nautical setting and characters mainly as vehicles to transport us to a larger, more significant idea. This is generally true of these last sea novels. While retaining much of the jargon and mundane naval matters, Cooper exploits his resources in a productive, positive way that he sometimes attempted with his early social and nationalistic themes, but there he generally did not succeed. And, of course, he comes to realize the limitless and numerous settings a sailing ship could carry its characters to. Not simply to exotic faraway places where romantic escapism could be foisted on the reader, but areas, such as we have in this last novel, which confront man with elemental reality. The whole idea that the voyage itself could represent an exploration into serious universal experiences is not seen in Cooper before Afloat and Ashore; and the

voyage as a Melvillean or Conradian exploration into self, into "reality" in some specific sense, is treated only in The Sea Lions. Surely much of the impact and significance of the forests and prairies in the Leatherstocking tales would diminish if they were simply forests and prairies. Specifically, these later works, with their spiritual underpinnings and climaxes, make expert use of the nautical expeditions as human ordeals. Although the dialogue is plodding more often in The Sea Lions, more explicitly doctrinaire than in either Afloat and Ashore or Wing-and-Wing, all of its episodes bear on the novel's specifically religious theme. There are no digressions as such. Thus, Thomas Dekker's claim that the "theological disputations" have no relevance to the action misses the unity and harmony of The Sea Lions. Indeed, such an assertion misses the textured symbolism that we have seen.

And is it not distinctly unfair to criticize and ignore a novel with the complexity of The Sea Lions because much of the narration involves specific theological discussion when we cheerily devour the plethora of existential utterings by the characters of such writers as Crane, Hemingway, Faulkner, Camus, and Kafka, to name only a few that quickly come to mind? Are characters like Stimson, Mary, and the converted Gardiner any less realistic, any less true to life? In protest and rebellion we allow an author and his characters tremendous latitude, but we rail

against proffers of piety and devotion. This bias makes no sense, and it finally tells us much more about the temper of our times and about ourselves than the quality of writing before us. Charles Brady is probably correct in saying that the moral and religious emphasis of his work is one reason for Cooper's loss of popularity today.⁹⁴

End-notes

75

James Fenimore Cooper, The Sea Lions; or, The Lost Sealers (1860; rpt. Lincoln, Nebraska: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 137. All references are to this edition.

76

Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel (New York: American Book Co., 1948), p. 154.

77

Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 231.

78

See Charles A. Brady, "Myth-Maker and Christian Romancer," in American Classics Reconsidered: A Christian Appraisal, ed. Harold C. Gardiner, S. J. (New York: Scribner's, 1958), p. 81; and Marius Bewley, The Eccentric Design (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1959), p. 189.

79

Melville, in Literary World, V (28 April 1849), quoted in George Dekker and John P. McWilliams, eds., James Fenimore Cooper: The Critical Heritage, p. 243.

80

Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 137.

81

Philbrick, James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction, p. 209.

82

Philbrick, p. 229.

83

See Philbrick, pp. 234 and following, for a discussion of Cole's influence on Cooper's work; also see Donald Ringe, "James Fenimore Cooper and Thomas Cole: An Analogous Technique," American Literature, 30 (1958), pp. 26-36.

84

Letters and Journals, V, 398.

85

Letters and Journals, V, 131.

86

See Leo Marx's classic study, The Machine in the Garden (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964).

87

Cooper's letters are valuable in revealing how similar his religious beliefs were to those Mary and Stimson utter in the novel. For instance, Cooper writes that "The pride of man makes him cavil at that which he cannot comprehend, while every thing he sees has a mystery in it," V, 289. There are many such remarks in volume V, especially, of Beard's collection of Cooper's letters. This volume covers 1849, during which Cooper made a systematic rereading of the Bible.

88

Joseph Conrad, from Life and Letters, quoted by Warren Walker in his preface to The Sea Lions, p. xiii.

89

Philbrick briefly traces the popular and literary significance of the Antarctic setting: ". . . American writers in the first half of the nineteenth century came to regard Antarctica as the special province of symbolic fantasy," p. 229.

90

Letters and Journals, V, 397.

91

Grossman, p. 234.

92

In The Pictorial Mode: Space and Time in the Art of Bryant, Irving, and Cooper (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1971), Donald Ringe cites The Sea Lions in his analysis of the uses of the pictorial among nineteenth century American writers who express "a deep concern with the need for close and accurate observation of the physical world in order to discern its meaning," p. 1. The ultimate goal of such perception is a glimpse of God, who reveals Himself in the sublimity of nature.

93

And in The Last of the Mohicans Cooper splits his major Indian characters into good (Uncas) and bad (Magua), as Roswell and Jason Dagget complement each other in moral and religious terms. Cooper repeats the Uncas-Magua pairing in The Prairie with Hard-Heart and Mahtoree.

As Howard Mumford Jones correctly observes, among American novelists Cooper "is unique in his total acceptance of trinitarian Christianity and his insistent interpretation of man and the universe in the light of this belief," Belief and Disbelief in American Literature (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 39.

VI. Conclusion and Miscellaneous Tales

Up to this point I have treated Cooper's nautical novels in their chronological order, but to discuss briefly the two remaining sea tales I must now depart from this plan. I chose to exclude Ned Myers (1843), which was published after Wing-and-Wing and before Afloat and Ashore, and Jack Tier (1848), which Cooper wrote between Afloat and Ashore and The Sea Lions, from the chronological scheme because they are decidedly lesser achievements than those novels which were written at about the same time. Why not just leave them out altogether? First, Ned Myers is something of a curiosity among Cooper's works since it is not, strictly speaking, fiction. Being a quasi-true-life story of one of Cooper's old shipmates, it offers interesting contrasts to Cooper's fictional treatments of similar characters. Second, Jack Tier is peculiar in that, appearing in 1848, it is an unexpected reversion to the romantic type of story that Cooper was writing between 1824 and 1842. Most commentators regard it, incorrectly, as one of Cooper's most realistic tales. And one must indeed marvel at how such an incredibly bad novel as Jack Tier can be praised by so many of Cooper's critics.

By most critical estimates and by Cooper's own insistence, Ned Myers is not a work of fiction but something of a cross between biography and fictionalized biography.

In various footnotes to the text, Cooper calls himself "Editor." When Cooper at age seventeen, in 1806, set off in the merchant marine service for a year "before the mast" as a prelude to his Navy experience, he first sailed on board the Sterling, and he had as a messmate a boy named Ned Myers. After returning from this voyage they were not to see one another for thirty-four years. When they were reunited by Ned's writing Cooper and asking him if he were the same Cooper he knew those many years before, the author befriended Ned at once, inviting him to his home in Ostego, writing letters to various Navy officials to help Ned receive a pension and disability payments, and so forth. When Cooper began to relive their youthful exploits and to hear Ned's life, he was soon struck with the notion of setting down in testimonial form his adventuresome life atsea. Ned had sailed on dozens of different vessels to almost all civilized areas of the world. Perhaps Cooper thought that here was an opportunity to show by comparison how true-to-life had been the seven sea tales he had written. Coming late in his career, this encounter with Ned and Ned's life story fits nicely with the moral and religious themes Cooper was exploring in his own novels. One reason for his undertaking this work is clear from the preface of the novel. He says his purposes were two-fold. One, he decided "to commit to paper the vicissitudes, escapes, and opinions of one of his old shipmates as a sure means of giving

the public some just notions of the career of a common sailor."⁹⁵

But Ned's life was significant in another interesting way. He had lived a fairly immoral, down-and-out life, but in his later years he had been, to some extent at least, born again and had repented his past debaucheries. So Cooper "hoped that the experience and moral changes of Myers might have a salutary influence" (p. vii) on his readers. Here, then, was real life moral tale, a testimonial to the spiritual ordeals Cooper was beginning to base his nautical tales on. Ned to Cooper was "living proof of the efficacy of faith, and of the power of the Holy Spirit to enlighten the darkest understanding and to quicken the most apathetic conscience" (p. x). Myers could demonstrate the worth and validity of the focal theme of Cooper's latter nautical tales: after many years of giving no thought to his soul but only to his appetities, Ned had finally come to recognize "those great truths which are so powerful to reform, and so convincing when regarded with humility and with a just understanding of our own weaknesses" (p. 1).

While most critics understandingly regard Ned Myers as a curiosity among Cooper's writings that was obviously influenced by Richard Henry Dana's Two Years before the Mast, the book is universally applauded for what George Dekker terms its "colloquial vigor"⁹⁶ and Grossman its

"limber raciness and easy simplicity."⁹⁷ That is, Cooper succeeds in telling the story in Ned's own voice, with his own simple speech and ideas controlling the narrative. Obviously, this limits the book as a work of art, whether we call it a biography or something else. Ned simply lacks ideas and an expansive mind. This fact also helps to account for Cooper's being able to set down Myers's whole life in 242 pages, whereas all of his other nautical books are nearer 500 pages long. In its brevity is to be found much of its freshness and vitality. Although some of the action is in its actuality pointless and without significance, the narrative never stalls, and there are no long digressions.

I would like to quote a single paragraph to illustrate the crisp pace and exact, vivid language of the novel. This episode requires no particular introduction since Ned simply relates this event along the way:

While we were up at the harbor, the last time, Mr. Mix, who had married a sister of Mr. Osgood, took a party of us in a boat, and we went up to black river shooting. The two gentlemen landed, and as we were coming down to the river we saw something swimming which proved to be a bear. We had no arms, but we pulled over the beast, and had a regular squaw-fight with him. We were an hour at work with this animal, the fellow coming very near mastering us. I struck at his nose with an iron tiller fifty times, but he warded the blows like a boxer. He broke our boat-hook, and once or twice, he came near boarding us. At length a wood-boat gave us an axe and with

this we killed him. Mr. Osgood had this bear skinned, and said he should send the skin to his family. If he did, it must have been one of the last memorials it ever got for him." (p. 60)

Such writing is vivid and to the point, as well as conspicuously monosyllabic. In addition to a colloquial vigor, this passage reflects an interest and liveliness which the first person point of view affords. Of the sea novels, only Ned Myers and Afloat and Ashore are told in the first person. It is no coincidence that they are the most readable of the group, even though Afloat and Ashore runs to nearly one thousand pages. Cooper's third person narrator, always himself, too often lectures, digresses, and overly interrupts. Of course the first hand accounts of Ned and Miles (and Natty Bumppo) frequently reveal a talkative narrator, but when a character is being developed, his musings and digressions can have a certain personality and charm about them that an impersonal narrator's cannot. Certainly there are such paragraphs in all of Cooper's books, but in Ned Myers they are the rule rather than the exception.⁹⁸

There seems little point in discussing the picaresque life of Ned Myers. Voyage and adventure simply follow voyage and adventure. But as Ned grows older, he begins for the first time to give some thought to his soul and to God. Like Roswell Gardiner, Ned had many "misgivings on the subject of the Savior's being the Son of God. It

seemed improbable to me, and was falling into the danger which is so apt to beset the new beginner--that of self-sufficiency, and the substituting of human wisdom for faith" (pp. 207-08). After many years of raucous, dissolute living, Ned finally undergoes a physical ordeal that has an immediate spiritual effect. While his trial is not so majestic as Gardiner's or even Miles Wallingford's, as his ill health and debilitating accidents occur, Ned is fairly well beaten into repentance. Aged, sick, and hopeless, he finally turns in his heart to religion. And so he ends his narrative, told naturally in the first person, as Cooper began it: "My great wish is that this picture of a sailor's risks and hardships may have some effect in causing this large and useful class of men to think on the subject of their habits" (p. 242).

Ned Myers, perhaps showing the far-reaching influence of Dana, is an attempt by Cooper to present a slice of a sailor's life. But beyond the pious moralizing noted above, the book has no theme of protest or outrage; its theme has no social or political dimension. It may, however, be regarded as a footnote of sorts to the education of the protagonist and to his religious struggles that we have witnessed in Cooper's mature sea fiction.

Unlike most commentators on Jack Tier, I find nothing to recommend in this novel; except for Mercedes of Castile, it is the worst use Cooper was ever to make of

the nautical scene. Jack Tier is by no one ranked among Cooper's better tales, but even its detractors, such as George Dekker, dislike it for the wrong reasons. Dekker, for instance, objects to the bestial portrait of Captain Spike, the villain of the story. Dekker finds it impossible to like such a misanthropic novel that has little in it moralistically to admire. Agreeing with the majority critical opinion, Dekker sees Jack Tier as a reworking of the earlier romantic tales but without the qualities of "strangeness, lightness, and elegance."⁹⁹ This, while an accurate observation, misses the more specific and serious problems that make this book bad as a story.

James Grossman is somehow able to find in this improbable tale a "stirring adventure story," and he calls it a "realistic reworking" of The Red Rover and The Water-Witch, which is a deceptively incorrect judgment.¹⁰⁰ And Donald Ringe tries to make a case for its being not an inferior rehashing of these early novels; rather, says Ringe, it "has much to say about the decline of values in modern life."¹⁰¹ Ringe concludes his analysis of Jack Tier by saying the "dominant tone is a grim one, for Cooper posits a world where coherence and order have been lost in the only standard of value that many will admit--monetary gain."¹⁰² It would be more accurate to say that the novel itself and not its theme is what lacks coherency and order.

The problems with this story, especially its improbabilities, begin at its outset. Captain Steven Spike is a ruthless, selfish, and greedy captain of an old, broken-down ship. Initially he appears more realistic than his literary ancestors, the Red Rover and the Skimmer. Like the latter Spike is a smuggler, but he is neither young, attractive, nor dashing. But he is also the only character of this novel who does not fit the stereotypical mold of the characters found in the early sea novels. Moreover, given this disgusting man, how can the young heroine, unsubtly named Rose Budd, her poor ignorant aunt, Mrs. Budd, and their familiar servant, a crotchety Irish lady named Biddy Noon, book passage on Spike's ship, the Molly Swash to allow Rose Budd to convalesce from some ill-defined malady? Similarly, the hero of the story, Harry Mulford, who is Spike's mate, is a typical romantic figure out of the early sea stories: like most of them Harry is "handsome . . . full of health, strength, and manliness."¹⁰³ The question is, why is such a fine fellow working for this cruel, debauched man? There is no answer.

The narrative of Jack Tier involves the voyage of Spike's vessel from New York to the Caribbean. The story is set during the War of 1812, with Spike smuggling gun powder to the Mexicans, which also on the surface makes him seem the direct opposite of the Rover, the Skimmer,

and the Pilot. But it is only these characteristics of Spike that give Jack Tier a realistic facade. The ladies instantly remind us of those in The Red Rover and Homeward Bound, not only in their temperaments and personalities but also in their presence aboard ship, as Harry reminds us of the various men. Another romantic, fantastic aspect of this book is the titular character. When we first meet Jack Tier he claims to be an old mate of Spike's, and in the opening scene he goes aboard the Molly Swash for the voyage. The incredible truth is not revealed until the end of the book: Jack is actually Molly Swash, who had been Spike's wife and abandoned by him twenty years earlier. To make an attempt at verisimilitude Cooper goes to extremes; it seems that from that day twenty years before, Molly has lived the life of a man in dress, personal appearance, job, and supposedly in every possible way. When her identity is finally revealed, she seems to Spike and to most everyone else to be a pitiful perversion. The obvious question about this odd person is why she behaved this way. Cooper clearly wants us to like Jack and then to care about and pity Molly. But how can a character who would pervert and throw away her whole life on a man as bestial and worthless as Spike evoke our admiration and sympathy?

There are other improbabilities. Once the Molly Swash reaches the Caribbean, Spike plays cat-and-mouse with an American cruiser. Twice he is boarded by the Americans.

But they are never able to discover that Spike is smuggling gunpowder packed inside flower barrels. Even though no one can make sense out of a cargo of flour in this region, even though Spike is overtly suspicious in demeanor and reeking of wrongdoing, and even though with the war such smuggling is common, no one, not even the first mate Harry Mulford, is able to see through Spike's ruse. They all seem to be as naive and ignorant as poor Mrs. Budd.

But what is most fantastic about this story, and not without some interest, is its climactic scene, with which, at first reading, Cooper does seem to be saying something important, albeit peculiar and grotesque. After finally escaping from Spike's clutches--he has announced his intention to woo and wed the frail Rose--Harry and Rose are quickly married by an American chaplain of the American cruiser on a little island in a deserted lighthouse. (During the episode of their escape, Harry at one point pretends to be a ghost, and everyone, including Spike, seems to believe that Harry's comical theatrics are actually those of a ghost). Once wedded, they set off with the Americans to apprehend Spike, who carries all the other principal characters aboard his ship. Spike is now in a hopeless predicament. He is outmanned, outgunned, and clearly all he can do is prolong his capture as he weaves his way though the mazelike islands and reefs. Yet we are asked to accept Spike's desperate, final attempts to escape

the approaching cruiser: One by one he either throws the people aboard the launch craft into the ocean to drown, or he has them stand and then maneuvers the boat so they will be thrown out. The climax of this action occurs when poor, feeble Mrs. Budd is dispatched. Although she falls out of the craft, she is able to cling to the side and plead with Spike and his crew to retrieve her. So Spike gives the order: "'Cast off her hand. . . . Cut her fingers off, if she won't let go!'" (p. 445). The boatswain "drew his knife across the wrist" and Mrs. Budd is seen no more. But still the Americans are gaining on them, so Spike says more "cargo" must go; he thus informs Jack Tier that he is next. Bravely Jack asks only that he be able to jump alone after he prepares himself. He prays, calling on God, Jesus, and Mary, and then leaps out of the boat, but Jack is able to swim to safety, the only one who does so. This brutal climax is what so enchants or repulses readers about this book, but there are many unlikely occurrences in this grisly ending. First, it is out of character for both Rose Budd and Harry Mulford to leave the ship with the other two women still aboard and at Spike's mercy. Second, and as noted above, Spike has no chance for escape, and base as he is, it is unlikely he would commit such acts with his own capture at hand.

Spike is finally shot and brought to a hospital on Key West. His long, drawn-out death scene is incredible.

Hardest to swallow is a sort of semi-conversion by Spike. He grieves over having abandoned his wife and feels as if he has been punished by God for his acts. And what is more, sweet Rose Budd, whose aunt and companions have just been brutally murdered, actually ministers to Spike in his last days. When Spike eventually does die, the scene is an odd one. The chaplain comes, "but even he, in the last moments of the sufferer, was little more than a passive but shocked witness of remorse, suspended over the abyss of eternity in hopeless dread. We shall not enter into the details of the revolting scene, but simply add that curses, blasphemy, tremulous cries for mercy, agonized entreaties to be advised, and sullen defiance were all strangely and fearfully blended" (p. 476). What does Cooper intend with this melange of emotions? Whatever he intends, Spike is too base a human being for his death to bring forth any emotion other than satisfaction that he is dead and that Molly is at last released from the peculiar life she has been forced to live.

As soon as Spike is dead, the scene immediately shifts to Harry and Rose's return to New York. Yet here Cooper begins a surprising and discordant digression on the merits of Washington as a capital city, the White House, and related matters. Even the author could not stay interested in his story.

These are not all of the flaws which afflict Jack Tier. Mrs. Budd, for example, who is ignorant about nautical matters while all the time pretending extensive arcane knowledge, is for page after page made a joke in her malapropish remarks. But this ridiculous routine really is not humorous the first time we hear it. Similarly, Jack Tier and Biddy Noon are given to repetitively stultifying dialogue. When Harry and the women are solitarily wrecked on a sinking ship during one episode, Biddy keeps up a constant refrain about how wonderful "'wather'" is. And if Jack Tier tells the others that Spike is a "'willain'" once, as she sits looking with a thoughtful but vacant countenance, she must say it a hundred times. Especially in this long episode involving all the main characters except the villain, Cooper repeatedly overwrites. For instance, Harry at one point is having to swim toward a beached craft with sharks in close pursuit of him: "Ten thousand bayonets, levelled in their line, could not have been one half as terrible, and the efforts of the young man became nearly frantic" (p. 264). This exaggerated image is supposed to heighten the tension and cause the reader anxiety over Harry's perilous situation. It falls far short of this goal, however. After Harry in this scene reaches the wreck and obtains food and water, he again gallantly confronts the sharks in his return to the wreck, but he is not so concerned about his predicament as about

saving sweet Rose "from a fate worse than drowning" (p. 208). Even if we say that the action in such an episode has a "more realistic" tint than a similar episode in the Red Rover, which would not even be true, still Cooper spoils the effect with his prose. He dissipates even the possibility that Harry will not be successful, and he has me hoping that Rose will at least receive a scratch for all of Harry's intrepid acts. The contrivance is explicit.

Jack Tier originally appeared in installments as "Rose Budd" in Graham's Magazine. Thus chapter beginnings and endings are stapled together in a Saturday serial sort of way, which offers another distraction to the reader. Judging from the novel's preface, Cooper's "serious" purpose for this story was to examine the bigotry, blind nationalism, and selfish pursuit that a war brings out in various people. This theme, however, either drowns with Mrs. Budd or is eaten by the sharks. No idea, romantic or realistic, holds this leaky story together.

It is perhaps ironically appropriate that I have ended this study of Cooper's sea fiction with one of the worst of these novels, for Cooper could write unquestionably bad books. A reader new to Cooper should go forward with one admonition clearly in mind: Do not read too selectively; read widely among his works. More than any other writer with the sort of reputation and fame Cooper's books have

brought him, he was capable of writing too quickly, unimaginatively, and repetitively. What one probably first notices in reading the five Leatherstocking or eleven sea tales is how similar plots and supporting characters tend to be. While not necessarily a weakness, this certainly does suggest Cooper's limits as a writer. Since he did not begin his career as a writer until he was thirty-one years old, this left him only twenty-eight years to produce the enormous bulk that he did write. Also Cooper wrote for the income his works brought him, as his many quibbling letters to his publishers indicate. Once he began writing, he was almost always in the middle of one novel and often two.

In respect to his sea fiction, the speed and bulk of his writing produced mixed results. On the one hand, we may wish he had not bothered with such books as Jack Tier, Mercedes of Castile, and at least one or two of the first five novels. Yet his continuing to experiment with and explore the resources available within the nautical setting is what enabled Cooper to enlarge and improve his use of this new genre. That is, he might not have written his best sea tales had he not learned through his poor ones. Today we should probably give him his highest marks not for helping to create this genre, but for his development and expansion of it. It is impossible to say whether

Melville and Conrad could have written their classic sea novels had it not been for Cooper's pioneering work, but as I have noted occasionally in this study, we certainly do hear echoes of various of Melville's works in Cooper.

Had Cooper written only the first five novels examined in Chapter II above, then I think his name would today appear only in historical and cultural studies of the period. Individual parts of each of these novels notwithstanding, as whole stories they simply say too little to us today. The nationalistic and patriotic themes no longer engage our imaginations as our freedom from the British is now an unquestioned fact. Having a secure national identity, what meaning can the questioning after such an identity hold for us? Moreover, there are several novels among Cooper's nautical ones which can neither survive nor merit intensive critical treatment; yet there remain a few which certainly deserve a better fate than simply being tools of cultural and intellectual history. The difficult aspect of this uneven performance from a scholarly viewpoint is to be found in the widespread disagreement over which novels fit into which group.

Cooper's first three attempts in the nautical genre are mainly entertaining tales of adventurous escapes, pursuits, and captures. These books are too lean in universal conflicts and themes to continue to engage our minds. Homeward Bound suffers from many of these same handicaps,

and in the caricatured attack on certain American types which it added to the nautical story, it is little more than a playful amusement to current audiences. As I have argued in the above pages, beginning with The Two Admirals, Cooper's nautical stories dropped the limited and ephemeral romantic themes for not only more serious, but simply more interesting conflicts and characters. My own marked preference for these latter works is based partly on a personal bias in favor of more realistic characters and plots. But beyond this, Cooper's desire to explore the moral and religious questions that these books present demanded the more realistic treatment that he gives them, and they consequently wear better.

Wing-and-Wing, Miles Wallingford, and The Sea Lions are more fully integrated works of fiction. Form and substance are more closely and consistently joined in them. Even if we are not particularly attracted by Cooper's explicit moralizing and proselytizing in these later works, we cannot ignore the importance of his subject and the sincerity with which he treats it. While these two traits will not make a bad novel good, they will at the very least give it a certain reason for being.

The most lasting and profound use Cooper put the nautical genre to is also not encountered until these late works. But he finally began to exploit the abundant opportunity the ocean and various remote locales offered

for solitary reflection, for elemental conflicts between man and nature, and for the questioning into the relationship between man and God. Cooper must be praised for the improvement discernable from reading the whole group and for his eventually creating in Miles Wallingford and The Sea Lions two well-crafted novels. And one should also not ignore what Thomas Philbrick has so thoroughly documented, that Cooper's sea fiction as compared with that of his few predecessors and with his many contemporaries comes off as the best of the lot. I hope my study of these novels has made clear that here is a group of books too often neglected, too little read and studied, which, while overall comparing unfavorably with the Leatherstocking series, do in the best of them make a serious challenge to being the highpoint of Cooper's literary career.

End-notes

- 95 James Fenimore Cooper, Ned Myers (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, n.d.), p. vii.
- 96 George Dekker, James Fenimore Cooper: The American Scott, p. 203.
- 97 James Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 184.
- 98 Cooper's Journals, especially for the time he was travelling abroad, beautifully illustrate his remarkable abilities with the English language. His perceptive and discerning eye was simply too often blinded by verbiage in his novels.
- 99 Dekker, p. 212. Dekker incorrectly includes The Sea Lions among Cooper's "misanthropic" novels.
- 100 Grossman, p. 225.
- 101 Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 131.
- 102 Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 134.
- 103 James Fenimore Cooper, Jack Tier (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, n.d.), p. 4.

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VITA

Philip Neil Cooksey, son of Neil and Edith Cooksey, was born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on December 15, 1945. After attending public schools in Oklahoma City and graduating from Northwest Classen High School in 1964, he in that same year enrolled at Oklahoma State University, from where he graduated with a B.A. degree in English in July, 1968.

After two years of military service in the U. S. Army, one year of which was spent in South Vietnam as a combat infantryman, the author returned to Oklahoma State University in January, 1971, to resume his education. He graduated with the M.A. in English from Oklahoma State University in July, 1972. During this same year he was inducted into the Phi Kappa Phi honor society.

The author began coursework for the Ph.D. at Louisiana State University in 1972. His area of major emphasis during his doctoral study has been American literature before the 20th Century. He expects to receive the Ph.D. in English in the summer of 1977.

The author was married on April 10, 1967, to Margaret Marie Posey. Their one son was born on January 9, 1968.